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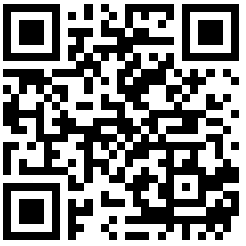

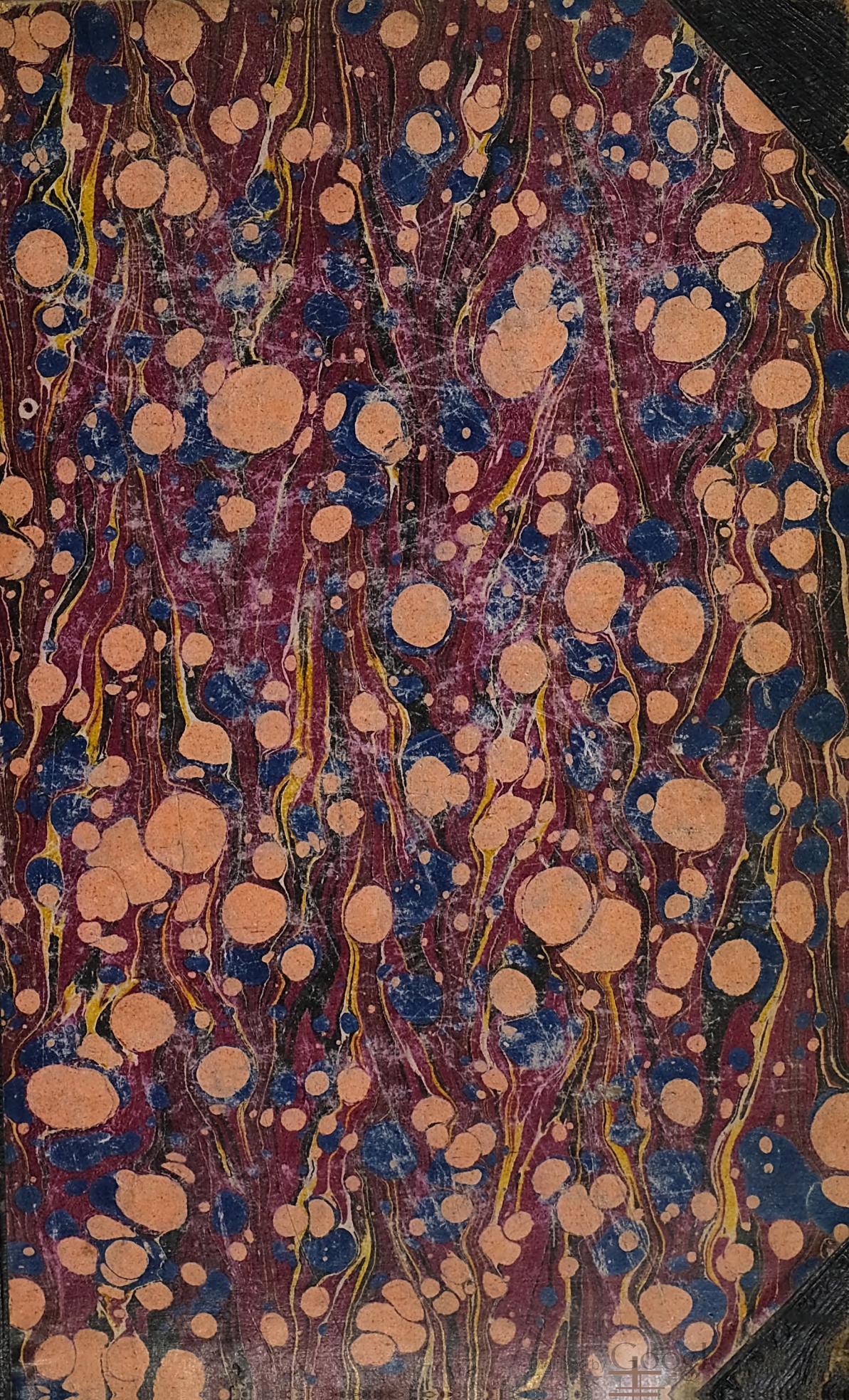

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FOOTBALL PICTURES. £100 IN PRIZES.

SHORT STORIES
A WEEKLY MAGAZINE FOR HOME AND TRAIN

No. 627. FOR WEEK ENDING JANUARY 5TH, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

"Absolutely Pure therefore Best."

CADBURY'S

COCOA

Free from Kola, Malt, Hops, or any foreign admixture. It is Cocoa and Cocoa only.

What CADBURY'S Cocoa is:

The Great Scientist, Baron von Liebig, says:

"COCOA is a perfect food, as wholesome as delicious, a beneficent restorer of exhausted power; but its quality must be good, and it must be carefully prepared. It is highly nourishing and easily digested, and is fitted to repair wasted strength and preserve health. It agrees with those whose occupations oblige them to undergo sevère mental strains; with public speakers, and with all those who give to work a portion of the time needed for sleep."

CADBURY'S COCOA is Absolutely Pure, and a Perfect Food.

Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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BIG PRIZE SCHEME FOR MARCH 1901.

25,602 PRIZES, value £10,000

LIST OF PRIZES!

1	Cash Prize	£50	£50 0
1	Cash Prize,	£40	40 0
10	Handsome Pianos, in walnut,	£40 each	400 0
5	Cash Prizes,	£25 each	125 0
10	Gents' Bicycles, Freewhee's,	£17 17s. each	178 10
10	Ladies' Bicycles, Free wheels,	£17 17s. each	178 10
10	Cash Prizes,	£10 each	100 0
20	Jones's Sewing Machines,	£8 each	160 0
20	Cash Prizes,	£5 each	100 0
50	Rolled Gold Lever Watches,	£2 10s. each	125 0
100	Cash Prizes,	£2 each	200 0
50	Dinner Services (56 pieces),	£2 each	100 0
50	Folding Bed Chairs,	£2 each	100 0
50	Ladies' Travelling Trunks,	£2 each	100 0
200	Cash Prizes,	£1 each	200 0
200	Ladies' Leather Hatboxes,	£1 each	200 0
100	Basket Arm Chairs, upholstered,	£1 each	100 0
400	pairs Blankets,	15s. per pair	300 0
200	½-doz Electro-plated Forks, large,	15s. per ½-doz.	150 0
200	½-doz. Electro-plated Forks, small,	15s. per ½-doz.	£150 0
500	Ladies' Umbrellas,	15/- ea.	375 0
500	Gents' Umbrellas,	15s. each	375 0
400	Best Electro-plated Teapots,	15s. each	300 0
400	Handsome Meat Carvers, with Steel in Case,	15s. set	300 0
1000	Cash Prizes,	10s. each	500 0
1000	pairs Bed Sheets	10s. each	500 0
1000	White Linen Table Cloths,	10s. each	500 0
1000	Ladies' Umbrellas,	7/6 each	375 0
1000	Ladies' Leather Purses,	7/6 each	375 0
200	½-doz. Table Knives,	7/6 per ½-doz.	75 0
200	½-doz. Dessert do.,	7/6 per ½-doz.	75 0
2000	Ladies' Dress Lengths, Navy Blue Serge,	7/6 each	750 0
2000	Cash Prizes of	5s. each	500 0
4715	Ladies' Leather Handbags,	4s. each	943 0
4000	½-doz. Fine Linen Cambric Handkerchiefs,	2/6 per ½-doz.	500 0
4000	Handsome Work-boxes,	2/6 each	500 0
25,602			£10,000 0

CONDITIONS OF COMPETITION.

The Tablets of **Watson's Matchless Cleanser** and of **Nubolic Soap** are enclosed in distinctive Wrapper. The prizes will be awarded in the above order to persons who send the highest number of Wrappers of either soap or both of them to **Joseph Watson & Sons Limited, Whitehall Soap Works, Leeds,** not later than MARCH 31ST, 1901. Each wrapper must be complete, and each package of the wrappers sent will be taken as one lot. Separate entries must be sent under separate covers. Full postage or carriage must be Paid. Each parcel must contain the full name and address of sender, and the number of Wrappers sent in must be marked on the same paper. On outside of parcel write lesibly "**Prize Competition.**" A list, giving result of the Competition, will be sent with each prize when it is sent out. Every wrapper must have first contained soap. No employee of Joseph Watson & Sons Limited will be eligible. All prizes will be despatched about April 25th.

WATSON'S MATCHLESS CLEANSER
The Best Soap for all purposes. Saves Health, Strength, and Wealth. Washes clothes with ease, Leaves them sweet and pure. Does not injure the most delicate fabric. **Largest sale of 1-lb. Tablets in the World.**

NUBOLIC SOAP
A PURE & PERFECT DISINFECTANT.
War s off Disease.
Saves Doctors' Bills. For Kitchen, Laundry, Bathroom, or Nursery.

Sold by all Grocers, Oilmen, &c., throughout the United Kingdom.

THE "GEO R. SIMS" HAIR RENEWER "TATCHO"

"While you wait"

LARGE TRIAL BOTTLES TO-DAY. **1s. 6d.**
Sent Post Free in plain package, twenty one stamps.

MRS. BROWN POTTER, whose beautiful hair is the envy of her sex, writes:
"I Use only 'TATCHO.'"

If your hair is falling or failing, you have your remedy. Don't hesitate. Use "TATCHO." The result will surprise you and will be intensely gratifying. It is sold in bottles by Chemists and Hairdressers allover the world; 2/9 and 5/-, or may be had direct in plain sealed package, post free, 2/11 and 5/3. Address:
The Geo. R. Sims Co., 81c Great Queen St., London, W.C.

WARNING. *Instead of using the common White Headache Powders, which generally consist entirely of a crude drug, which has been condemned as dangerous by the medical papers, insist on having a bona-fide anti-quack remedy, recommended by such eminent medical authorities as Dr. RAMAGE, L.R.C.P., Dr. THURSTIN, L.R.C.P., late Dr. BOYD-WILLIAMS (Liverpool), the Editor of the Medical Journal, "Health," etc., etc. The name of this safe remedy is KAPUTINE.*

ALL LEADING CHEMISTS SELL IT, OR CAN GET IT FOR YOU IN A FEW HOURS.

Sold by BOOT'S, TAYLOR'S, DAY'S, WHITE'S and other Stores. Most Co-operative Stores sell it.

PACKETS, 1/-. SAMPLES ONE PENNY,

or KAPUTINE LIMITED, HUDDERSFIELD,
will send it FREE for 12 stamps.

WORTH A CROWN A DOSE.

THE MOST NUTRITIOUS.
EPPS'S
GRATEFUL—COMFORTING.
COCOA
BREAKFAST—SUPPER.

VARICOCELE.
Every man suffering from Varicocele and the allied troubles, should send for treatise, describing their Causes, Symptoms, Results, and Successful and Painless Treatment without surgical operation or the use of cumbersome trusses and electrical appliances. Will be sent sealed, post free, three stamps.
S. S. MURRAY,
7, Southampton Row, London, W.C.

VIE D'OR FOR THE HAIR.
THE AMERICAN TREATMENT.
Vie d'Or puts 10 years on the life of the hair.
SOLE AGENT:
GUSTAV ROSSELLI, 4 New Park Street, Park Lane, LEEDS.
Price 2/9 post free.

2/9 CHALLENGE TO THE WORLD—OUR WARRANTED TIMEKEEPER, 2/9

With a guarantee to keep correct time for three years, will be sent to any address on receipt of P.O. or stamps value 2/9 and three stamps extra for postage. To every purchaser during this month we give with it ABSOLUTELY FREE a strong Mexican SILVER CHAIN. All we ask of you is to show them to your friends, as by doing so you advertise our business.
GENEVA WATCH IMPORTERS, 148 Old Street, London, E.C.

ESTABLISHED 1851.
BIRKBECK BANK
Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, London.
2% on CURRENT ACCOUNTS, on the minimum monthly balances when not drawn below £100.
The BIRKBECK ALMANACK, with full particulars, post free.
FRANCIS RAVENSCROFT, *Manager.*

Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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SHORT STORIES

No. 627.] For the Week Ending January 5th, 1901. [One Penny.

FOR HIGH STAKES.

A cloudless June sky above, a dusty California moutain road, and a young tenderfoot from Ohio, mounted on a stout broncho, with an outfit consisting of a roll of blankets and a six-shooter.

Fired with visions of suddenly acquired wealth, I had a few weeks before started for California, sorely against the wishes of my parents and advice of my friends.

I was riding slowly up the long mountain grade, headed for the gravel mines of the North Fork of Yuba, and calculated to make the Mountain House by dark, when I was overtaken by a horseman, who rode up beside me with a genial "How are you, stranger?"

He was a fine-looking man of about thirty, with a blonde beard, and the handsome horse he bestrode was somewhat jaded. We rode on together up the grade, and fell into conversation.

He inquired where I was from, and where I was bound for, both of which questions I answered frankly. He told me that he was a mine-owner on the Middle Fork; that he had just made a business trip down the ridge, and was in a hurry to get back, and added that I had better come on with him and he would give me a job. I gratefully accepted his offer, and when we stopped to water about half-way up the grade, he asked me to carry a small pair of saddle-bags, as his horse was pretty well beat.

I complied cheerfully, as my beast was comparatively fresh. The bags were heavy, and he remarked as he handed them over that they contained the coin from his last clean up. With a due appreciation of the importance of the trust, I felt for my six-shooter, and we pushed on up the grade. Arrived at the top he took a cross road, remarking that he guessed we could make old man Brown's by night.

I found him a pleasant, entertaining fellow, and being no doubt conceited, imagined that he found me the same. It was nearly dark when we rode up to a low, rambling, old building, which he designated as "old man Brown's," and added that it was rather a hard place, but any port in a storm.

As we rode up to the porch a slender girl of about fourteen with big brown eyes and a shock of red curls, came running round the corner of the house. She looked as wild as a deer, and my first thought was, "What a beauty she will make some day!" I raised my sombrero, and asked if we could get accommodation for the night.

"Dunno; I'll ask dad," she said shortly, and darted into the house through the bar-room.

A moment later a portly old man in list slippers made his appearance, rubbing his hands and smiling benignly.

"How are you, boys? Want to stop? All right. Here, Jess, call Joe to take the horses."

I had just dismounted, and started to remove the saddle-bags, when a glance at my travelling companion checked me. He was gazing back down the road, and listening intently. I saw a greyish pallor overspread his face. The next moment he struck spurs into his horse, and without a word galloped down the road in the opposite direction, into the gathering darkness.

Glancing back, I saw a number of horsemen riding furiously down upon me.

Surprised and alarmed, I sprang again into the saddle, and as the sound of horses approaching at a rapid rate came to my ears, I started on down the road after my late companion. My first thought was that highwaymen were on our track.

Glancing back, I saw a number of horsemen riding furiously down upon me. I heard loud oaths and orders to halt. Without heeding them, I spurred on, and drew my six-shooter, determined to sell my life as dearly as possible. The next moment a volley of shots rang out, and my horse stumbled and fell.

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Before I could rise, I was surrounded by the roughest-looking crowd of men it has ever been my misfortune to encounter. Cries of "Kill him!" "Shoot him!" "Hang him!" were heard on all sides, and a dozen hands seized me in no gentle grasp. My horse lay dead. One of the men thrust his hand into the saddle-bags, and pulled out a sack of coin.

"Here you are, boys! Here's the swag! Hang the blanked thief!" he shouted.

"Let's take him over to Brown's, and hear what he's got to say," said a tall man, who seemed to be leader.

This proposition met with general disfavour, especially from one officious man, who took a rawhide lariat from his saddle, and leading the way to a spreading oak tree that stood near, exclaimed:

"Here's a good limb! Fetch him along, boys!"

But the tall man demurred, and had his way.

"If he can't give a straight account of himself, we'll make short work of him."

I attempted to explain, but a pistol was held at my head with the peremptory command to shut up. My arms were then securely bound with the lariat. I was marched back to Brown's, and placed in one corner of the bar-room.

The crowd then demanded liquid refreshment, which was served by Brown. The girl Jess stood in the doorway looking at me curiously, and I thought rather pityingly.

My trial then began. It was brief and to the point.

The stage had been robbed the day before, the express messenger killed, and several thousand dollars stolen. The robbers, supposed to be two in number, had escaped, and these men had organised a party to hunt them down. Had tracked them thus far, and succeeded in capturing me, with part of the stolen money in my possession.

Brown testified to our riding up a few minutes before they came, and asking leave to stop overnight; and added, with a solemn shake of his head, that they had "let the worst one get away."

They then demanded to know what I had to say, and I told my story in as straightforward a manner as possible. It was listened to incredulously by most of them; but among a few I thought I saw looks that encouraged me, and I wound up with an impromptu appeal for life and liberty which I felt must touch them.

I was doomed to bitter disappointment when the lank man, who had "Missouri" written in every lineament, and who had been so officiously anxious to hang me at once, arose, and after expectorating, remarked, with a harsh laugh:

"Young feller, you can't come it over us that-a-way. Come on, boys! Let's string him up."

Several rose, and with oaths loud and deep seconded the motion. My blood ran cold, as I realised my imminent peril. These rough miners, who certainly had strong circumstantial evidence against me, felt perfectly justified in hanging me to the nearest tree. What could I do? I gazed from one to the other like a hunted animal.

"Surely you would not hang a man on such evidence as this?" I cried. "If you will untie me, I can show you letters that will prove who I am."

The tall man, whom they called Joe, stepped up and untied me. I drew out a letter from my mother which I had received while in San Francisco. It contained a card photograph of my pretty sister Alice, which fell to the floor as I drew out the letter. Joe picked it up.

'It is my sister's picture," I cried. "Here; read the letter, any of you. It will prove that I am an honest man."

Joe was gazing earnestly at the picture.

"Tell you what, boys, this here's a little beauty!"

In my heart I blessed her pretty face, and only wished her there to plead for me in person.

The picture was passed round, and hope sprang up in my heart, when the old Missourian, who seemed thirsting for my gore, dashed it down again by exclaiming:

"How do ye know but what he stole that letter and picter from someone on the stage, or out of the mail bag? It's all bosh! Let's hang him and done with it!"

Joe took the photo again, and glanced from it to me.

"Now, look'ee here, Mizzoo—seems to me yer a-gittin' cold-blooded in yer old age. Anybody with half an eye can see that this gal looks like him."

I thanked Heaven for the resemblance, which was slight, and began to hope again. The girl Jess crowded in among the men, and asked to see the picture. Joe handed it to her, jocosely remarking that he'd marry her when she got to be as handsome as that.

She quietly replied:

"Shut yer mouth," and gazed intently on the picture.

"I'll bet that's his sister," she said presently.

"I'm inclined to think so myself," said Joe. "I think we'd better wait, boys, and take him down to the bar."

At this there was a dissenting murmur, which grew so strong that my courage failed again. Suddenly Joe turned to the crowd, and cried:

"Tell ye what, boys. Let's lay it on to luck. I'll play him a straight game of freeze-out. If he loses, he's our meat. What do ye say?"

The idea seemed to tickle the fancy of the crowd. They evidently had confidence in Joe's ability to play poker. Unfortunately for me it was a game of which I knew nothing, and I told them so.

The girl Jess was still standing beside Joe.

"Let me play for him," she said eagerly. "Luck's always with me."

"Yes! Let her play," cried the men, evidently amused at the novelty of the thing, and also sure that Joe's superior skill would win. "Let Jess play for him. Can you stake her, young feller?"

I looked at the girl curiously. Her big dark eyes were glittering with excitement, but she was cool and self-possessed. Taking out my purse, which contained my wealth, about one hundred dollars, I handed it to her.

The cards were produced, and in a few moments she and Joe were seated opposite each other, and the game began.

It was a weird scene; and I had the odd feeling that I was simply a spectator, and in no way concerned. I remember wishing for sketching materials, that I might transfer it to canvas. What a picture it would make. The low-ceiled, uninviting room; the smoky lamps shedding a flickering light upon the eager group round the table. I could see the face of the young girl, and knew that in all probability my life hung upon her "luck."

She played in silence, except to indicate how many cards she wanted at the draw. It was an even game for a while, then Joe began to win, and her pile of coin gradually diminished. She played coolly on, despite the comments of the crowd.

She was down to her last dollar when the tide turned in her favour. She won steadily, raking in the coin each time, till Joe was nearly broke. He began to bet cautiously, having evidently no desire to be beaten by a girl.

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I watched her face closely for some sign of excitement, but none was visible. She was thoroughly self-possessed, and the fact that she held my life in her hands had no outward effect upon her. Luck turned in Joe's favour again, and they were soon about even. The crowd grew impatient.

"What 're ye afraid of, Joe? Where's yer nerve? Why don't yer bet?" and like expressions were heard, while others encouraged the girl. "Old man Brown" came round and patted her on the shoulder, remarking that "Jess always did have the dog-on-dest luck."

They made it a jack pot, and it was Joe's deal. Jess opened it for ten dollars and discarded two. Joe also discarded two, and after the draw gave a short laugh and raised her ten. She glanced at her coin in an uncertain way, then at her hand. She had three dollars less than he. The excitement was intense. For a moment only the heavy breathing could be heard. Then Jess laughed a little and pushed her last dollar into the pot.

Old "Mizzoo" broke into a discordant laugh.

"Jess don't bluff worth a cent!" he cried.

Joe calmly pushed in the rest of his money.

"It'll be make or break this time,' he said, glancing over at me. "Sorry fer ye, young feller. Boys, git yer rope. What ye got, Jess?"

She quietly laid down four nines and the jack of hearts. He held three aces and a pair of eights. He struck the table a blow that made the money jingle.

"Good girl! Luck's on your side. I'd 'a' staked my last cent on a full like that, but yours are too much fer me. Come on, boys! Let's irrigate."

He led the way to the bar, followed by the crowd, now seemingly in the best of humours. Jess calmly raked in the pot, put the money in my purse and handed it to me, remarking laconically:

"Here; you'd better take this and git."

"I don't want it all," I exclaimed. "Only what I put in."

"Keep it all. It's yours. They've killed your horse," and before I could say anything more she left the room.

My first impulse was to put as much distance as possible between myself and the crowd, but on second thoughts I reflected that there was no other house within several miles, that I knew nothing of the country, and if I started out on foot I was liable to be run down by another gang of robber hunters. I therefore put on a bold front and asked Brown to give me a lodging for the night.

He struck the table a blow that made the money jingle.

He picked up a guttering candle, called Jess, and told her to show me up to the "corral." This was a big loft over the bar-room, in which there were a dozen or more uninviting-looking beds.

She placed the candle on a box beside one of these and was about to leave the room, when I detained her.

"Miss Jessie, I have not yet thanked you for what you have done for me to-night. My life is not worth much but I should have hated to have given it up in such a manner. Is there nothing I can do to show my gratitude?"

She laughed in an embarrassed manner.

"Why, it wasn't anything. I like to play! I'd 'a' done it for anybody."

"I'm sure of that; but is there nothing I can do for you?"

She hesitated a moment.

"Would you mind giving me that picture?"

"What! My sister's? No, indeed; you can have it and welcome. She is one of the sweetest girls on earth, and would be only too glad to do what she could for anyone who is kind to me."

She took it and thanked me.

"I thought I'd like to look at it. I'm much obliged. Good-night."

I did not see her about the house next morning. All the participants in the wished-for necktie party of the night before had vanished. I saw nothing of the saddle-bags, so concluded they had taken them.

I inquired for Miss Jessie, and was told that she had gone off early to drive up some cattle on the "divide." The Chinese cook provided me with a scanty breakfast, and when the stage came by I mounted it with a feeling of inexpressible relief.

Half-an-hour later, as we rounded a curve in the road, we came face to face with Jess. She was mounted on a vicious-looking, black mustang, and galloped rapidly past, her bright curls streaming in the wind. I had only time to raise my hat in response to a smile of recognition, when she passed, as I then thought, out of my life for ever.

* * * * *

I had been in the mines but a short time when I received the sad news of my father's death, accompanied by an urgent request from my mother that I return home at once and take charge of his business affairs. This was incumbent upon me, as I was an only son.

So within three months of the time of my arrival in California, I was in London again, my gold-hunting fever slightly abated, but still hoping to return to the Pacific Coast; but circumstances combined to prevent it.

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Without being obtrusive, I kept them in sight.

Alice welcomed me with open arms. She was intensely interested in my California experience, and wished very much to write to Jessie and thank her for liberating me from my dangerous situation; but as I did not know her address, she had to abandon the idea.

She died the second year after I returned, leaving only my mother and myself. As she was averse to leaving the old home, I remained there until her death, some twelve years later. Then finding life intolerably monotonous, I arranged my business, in which I had been very successful, so that I could leave for an indefinite time.

I felt a strong desire to revisit the scenes of my early California experience, and in due time found myself at Peak City. Much of its former glory had departed. The closing of the hydraulic mines had caused quite an exodus from that region. I decided to make the mountain trip on horseback as of yore, so hired a good one from the only livery-stable in the town, and one bright June morning started again over the almost forgotten mountain grades.

About two o'clock I overtook a heavily-laden waggon, drawn by six powerful horses. The sun's rays were uncomfortably warm, the road was dusty. Just ahead was the watering trough, where the stranger overtook me so long ago.

The driver of the team ahead was a stalwart six-footer. He wore a blonde beard and a slouch hat, and walked beside the wheelers. He had a black snake looped about his shoulders, and every now and then spoke encouragingly to the straining animals. As we reached the trough, I drew rein beside him. He eased the horses back from a heavy pull, and answered my salutation pleasantly. Something in the man's face struck me as familiar.

He watered his team, then climbed upon the waggon-box, produced a flask, and invited me to "smile" with him. I returned the compliment with a cigar, and we entered into conversation.

I inquired if he knew what had become of the old man Brown, who kept a stopping-place over on the divide years ago.

He looked at me keenly for a moment.

"Oh, yes. The old buzzard kicked the bucket some time ago. Struck a good mine and couldn't stand prosperity. What's become of the girl? Blanked if I know. Took her down to 'Frisco, and put her to school. Seems to me I did hear she married Tom Stewart, Brown's old partner, but he's gone up the flue, too, I hear. Old place is gone to rack; nobody lives there now. Good stopping-place about a mile the other side, though. Stan' up, Bell!"

The handsome grey mare in the "off lead" arched her neck, the other horses tossed their heads and straightened their traces, the black snake gave a resounding crack in close proximity to the big near wheeler's heels, and the waggon moved on up the mountain side.

I rode on ahead no longer puzzled as to where I had met the stalwart driver, for memory straightway carried me back to my acquaintance of fourteen years before, who had so unceremoniously deserted me that memorable night at old man Brown's. He had changed but little while I, who was but a boy then, was now bearded and bronzed, and had no fear of being recognised.

I rode on, musing on the ups and downs of life, and presently reached the cross-road. I found the old hostelry a heap of ruins, the roof having been crushed in some previous winter by the weight of snow.

I unsaddled my horse and allowed him to graze for a time, while I wondered as to the whereabouts of the red-haired lassie, who had played such a fearless game that night, and reflected that by this time she was probably playing faro in some of the underground palaces of San Francisco.

After drifting aimlessly round among the mining towns of the Sierras for some weeks, I went to San Francisco, and I spent some time in noting the changes time had wrought in that queenly city by the sea.

One day, while strolling on the beach by the Cliff House, I came face to face with a beautiful woman who both interested and puzzled me. She was tall and well formed, with fine brown eyes, and a heavy coil of dark auburn hair. She was dressed in black, plainly, but with distinction, and had every indication of wealth and refinement. She was accompanied by an elderly woman, whom I heard her address as "auntie." I managed to pass and repass them several times, and fancied the brown eyes glanced at me rather interestedly.

Without being obtrusive, I kept them in sight, and returned to the city on the same tram. I secured a seat just behind them, and devoted myself to studying her every detail of dress and manner.

Arrived at the terminus, they entered a cab, and were driven away, and I returned to the hotel, more interested than I cared to confess.

For years I had been so devoted to my mother, and to business, that no thought of marriage had seriously entered my mind. Now I suddenly realised that grey hairs were creeping among the black, and, if I ever intended to marry, it was high time I gave the matter my attention. How much the thought of a pair of brown eyes had to do with this resolution, I cannot say.

For several days I wandered round the various places

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of amusement and interest, with a vague hope of meeting her again.

One evening I strolled into the Opera House, and stood near the door, where I could observe all who entered. My patience was rewarded, for the two ladies came in just before the curtain rose. As she passed me I fancied I saw again a look of interest in her eyes. I procured a seat as near her as possible and watched her all the evening, failing more hopelessly in love each moment, and this without knowing if she were married or single.

At the close of the performance I managed to keep very near them. As they passed me my brown-eyed beauty dropped her fan. I sprang forward, picked it up, and presented it with the most graceful bow at my command. She thanked me most graciously, passed on, and entered a carriage, leaving me in a state of bliss bordering upon imbecility.

A week passed without my seeing her, although I haunted the principal thoroughfares by day and the theatres by night.

I was beginning to despair, when, in strolling through the conservatory at Golden Gate Park one day, I again met her accompanied by the same elderly lady. They were examining some rare orchids. When her eyes met mine, I distinctly saw a pink flush steal over her lovely face, and fancied I saw a smile in the brown eyes, but she bent over a flower, and I passed on, mentally reviling my luck at my inability to obtain an introduction.

They soon passed out and took a shady seat in the park. I sat down as near as possible, without being obtrusive, and, taking out a paper, pretended to read. In reality I watched her over the top.

Presently they rose and passed on, and I saw, with a thrill of delight, that my divinity had left her purse on the seat.

Instantly a spirit of covetousness took possession of me. I must have that purse at all hazards. I immediately arose and appropriated it, dreading lest I should be seen, and passed into another part of the park, feeling delightfully guilty.

Arrived at a place free from observation, I examined my treasure. It contained a twenty-dollar gold piece, some silver, and a few cards and memoranda. On one of the cards was written a name and address, "Jessie E. Stewart, No. 231 Mason Street."

I felt elated. I had heard her companion address her as Jessie, that day in the conservatory. I determined to wait till the next day, call at the address, and return the property.

In the next morning's paper I saw an advertisement of the lost purse, with the request that the finder would return it to the same address as that on the card and receive a reward.

I wondered if I should receive the reward I so much desired—an acquaintance with her—and determined to return it that morning.

About ten I rang the bell of a pretty house, in the prettiest residential portion of the city.

A neat servant maid answered my ring. I asked for the lady who had advertised the lost purse.

"Oh, yes," said she. "Step into the library. She will be down in a moment."

She ushered me into a lovely little room, and ran upstairs, leaving me staring stupidly at a life-sized portrait of my sister Alice, which hung on the opposite wall.

In an instant it all flashed across me. The resemblance to so me one I had met puzzled me no longer.

I saw, as in a dream, the low-ceiled room in the old house in the Sierras, the rough faces of the miners, the eager eyes of the young girl as she sat there playing for my life.

As I gazed at the picture a light step sounded behind me, and turning I stood before the woman I had been following for weeks, to find in her the heroine of my early California experience.

She laughed musically and held out her hand.

"Ah, Mr. Elliott, I see you recognise me through your sister's portrait. Now, my memory is far better than yours, for I recognised you the day I saw you by the Cliff House. Have I, then, changed so very much since that night? Let me see, it was fourteen years ago, was it not?"

I seized both her hands in an impulsive clasp. Though I remembered her as

> A thin slip of a girl like a new moon,
> Sure to be rounded into beauty soon,

I had no idea she would develop into such a beautiful woman as this.

"Changed? Yes. You have changed very much, but it is strange I did not recognise you. I ought to have done so."

"There is nothing strange about it. I have changed very much—for the better, I hope. I have had a strange story. Sit down and let me tell it to you."

I did so most willingly, and and she went on:

"In the first place, I am not old man Brown's daughter. I know nothing of my parents, except that both died of yellow fever in New Orleans, when I was a baby. Mr. and Mrs. Brown adopted me and brought me to California. They built that house, and I was brought up there, with no 'advantages' except to lay up an abundant supply of health. I was as wild as a hawk, and almost as fierce, I think.

I stood before the woman I had been following for weeks.

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I caught her in my arms, claiming my reward.

"When I was ten years old, Mother Brown died. After that I ran completely wild. Father was always good to me, but always let me have my own way to a shocking extent.

"The year after you were there, Father Brown had the luck to strike rich gravel in land that he owned. He took in a partner, Mr. Stewart, and at once brought me down here and put me to school. What a time I did have at first! I was like a caged hawk. I know I gave my poor teachers no end of trouble, but they were kind, and I soon began to take interest. Besides, I always kept that picture you gave me, and I know the sight of her sweet face somehow kept my feet in the path of duty. I became very much attached to one of my teachers, Miss Rose. She is the one with whom you have seen me.

"Father Brown died the year after I was put in school, leaving me in care of his partner, Mr. Stewart. When I was old enough to leave school, I had no home, so Mr. Stewart kindly got me out of that difficulty by marrying me.

"He was very kind to me, and I missed him greatly when he died. I induced Miss Rose to make her home with me, and she has been with me ever since. We travelled a great deal for some years, and have not been here very long. I have often thought that I should meet you again. The picture you gave me has been a great comfort to me. When I grew restless and discouraged at school, I always fancied her sweet eyes looked at me reproachfully, and when I had won an unusually hard battle with myself, I seemed to read commendation in them. I had it enlarged, as you see, and you don't know what a comfort it has been to me."

She insisted that I should stay to lunch, and brought Miss Rose in to entertain me while she superintended the same. When I finally left, it was with a promise to call the next evening.

Of course I did so, and found her more charming than ever. Before long it seemed that I only lived from one time of seeing her till the next.

One night I escorted them to the opera. When we returned it was late, but Jessie, as I always called her to myself, insisted that I should come in.

She had been unusually full of spirits that evening, and her gay laughter and sallies of wit had completely enthralled me. Miss Rose said good-night, and discreetly left us at the library door.

I had a "now or never" feeling, that caused a peculiar sensation to perambulate up and down my spine. I thought the darkness of the room would be a favourable opportunity, but before I could take the slightest advantage of the situation, she turned a flood of gaslight upon the scene, and gave me a tantalizing look that was too much for even my cowardice, and the next moment I had her in my arms, urging my suit with all my ardour.

But she was obdurate. She broke away from my detaining clasp, and tossing her wrap upon a chair, cried gleefully:

"So you say you love me. Very well, we will let fate decide it. I won you once, fair and square, now see if you can win me. We will play a straight game, just as we did that night long ago, only you shall take Joe's place. If you win, I am yours. If not, I remain single."

She produced a pack of cards and box of chips, seated herself at a small table, and motioned me to the opposite seat. There was nothing for it but to obey. She divided the chips, and at a motion from me dealt.

I had an odd feeling that she would keep her word, and abide by the decision of the cards. We played in silence for awhile she getting the best of the game.

I began to bet recklessly, in hopes of retrieving my waning fortunes, but luck was steadily against me.

I fancied I saw a disconcerted look in her eyes when she saw my pile reduced to five. I took heart at this and began to win. We were soon nearly even, when an idea took possession of me.

On the next deal I drew but one card. She took three and the betting began. I went slowly at first but with a confident air that deceived her.

I raised her till she had but three chips left. I calmly pushed in three.

She hesitated a moment, then threw down the cards, "Take it!" she said.

I quietly gathered in the chips, putting my bobtailed flush out of sight, and saw as I gathered up the cards, that she had jacks and trays.

With such odds in my favour, I began to be very hopeful: I dealt, each drew two. She quietly laid down her last chip, and I called her.

She had three queens and a pair of eights. I threw down four trays, and caught her in my arms, claiming my reward. She granted it, fully and freely, but I never told her what a bluff I played.

E. A. T.

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Mr. Bowser's Tribulations.

XXXIII.—HE BUYS A FIRE EXTINGUISHER AND PROCEEDS TO EXTINGUISH.

JUST as the Bowsers had finished dinner the other evening a van drove up with a parcel, and as it was brought in Mrs. Bowser looked at it and turned round for an explanation. Mr. Bowser didn't give one until they got upstairs; then he assumed a look of superior wisdom and began:

"Do you know the money value of the property annually destroyed by fire in the United Kingdom?"

"It must be quite large," replied Mrs. Bowser.

"It amounts to millions of pounds, my dear woman. Not only that, but at least a thousand lives are sacrificed to the fire fiend every year. Business is interrupted and ruined, homes made desolate, wives made widows and children made orphans by the devouring element. You should read up the statistics. They will furnish you more food for reflection than a hundred novels."

"Have you posted yourself well up in them?" she asked, with a tartness in her tones.

"Certainly I have. You don't imagine I am talking through the top of my head, do you? It was my duty to post myself, and I know all about it. There were just 11,329 fires in the country last year, and the loss was exactly £23,451,812 19s. 2½d. The point I wish to emphasize is that of these 11,329 fires 9,288 were due to carelessness."

"How carelessness?"

"The carelessness of women and children mostly. Every time you heat your curling-irons you may set fire to the house. The cook's carelessness may start a fire in the kitchen. You light the gas and drop a match. The cook flings matches about where the rats can get at them. At any hour of the day or night your absent-mindedness may reduce this home to ashes."

"And how about your leaving lighted cigar-ends about?" asked Mrs. Bowser. "You have burnt three holes in this carpet, spoilt the piano cover, set the curtains on fire, and done other damage."

"I am talking statistics."

"Woman, I am talking statistics!" shouted Mr. Bowser as he turned on her with such majestic dignity that the cat wondered if she had ever met him before. "Passing over the fact that you and the cook and even this silly old cat are liable to set this house on fire any day in the year, let me say that if people had been prepared for fires there would not have been half the loss of property given in the statistics. While I can't watch over you from hour to hour, I can in a measure guard against your carelessness by being prepared to nip the conflagration in the bud."

"Then that package downstairs is a conflagration nipper?" she asked.

"Don't try to be funny, woman. This is a matter not only of pounds, shillings and pence, but of life and death, and I want it treated seriously. That package down in the hall is a fire extinguisher. You may at some time or other have heard of one, the same as you have heard of a hammer or a thrashing machine."

"Yes; I have heard of them."

"It is to extinguish incipient conflagration. For instance, I awake at midnight and smell smoke. I jump out of bed and come down here to find a fire just starting in that cupboard—a fire due to your carelessness. Left to itself for five minutes more, and away would go the house and our lives, but by means of the extinguisher I extinguish."

"Which is very kind of you," she observed.

"Still trying to be funny, are you? The object is to provoke me, but it will fail. I have not yet purchased the extinguisher, but have brought it home to test it. I want you to learn how to handle it, so that you may be prepared in my absence. It will also be well for the cook to know how."

"Are you going to set the house on fire in order to put it out?"

"No, madam; I'm not. I am going to set fire to a pile of newspapers

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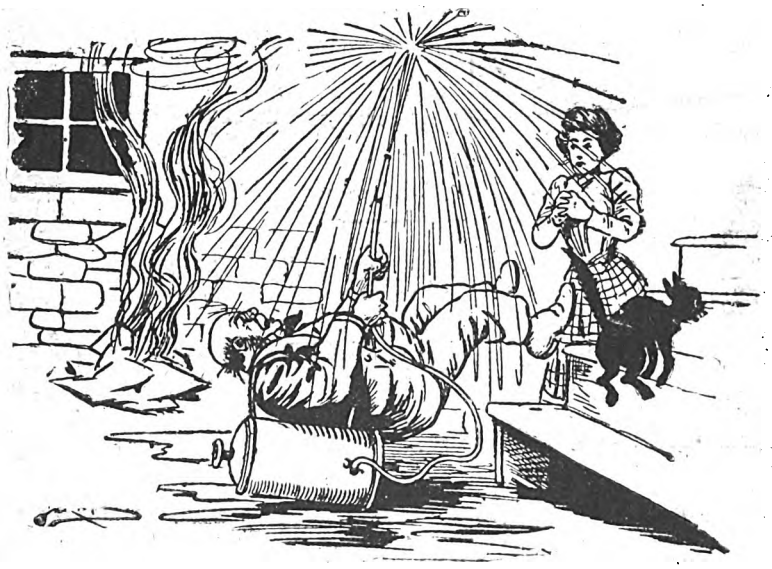

He rolled over and over to the cellar bottom.

on the cement floor of the cellar and then show you how to douse the flames out. There will be some little smoke, but that can go out of the windows."

Mrs. Bowser felt certain that some disaster would happen if anything of the sort were attempted, but it was either give in or have a row, and she gave in. The cook felt the same way, but she wanted to keep her place for the winter.

Before going down into the cellar, Mr. Bowser unwrapped the extinguisher and explained what it was charged with and how it worked. He also gave a brief history of the great fire of London which might have been prevented by a cool man and an extinguisher.

Then the trio proceeded down into the cellar, and he heaped up a lot of old newspapers and gave a history of the conflagration at the Paris Bazaar which could also have been checked in its infancy by one squirt from a squirter.

"Now, then," he continued as he opened the cellar windows and got ready to strike a match, "we will make this scene as realistic as possible. It is midnight. I awake to smell smoke and hear the faint crackling of the destructive flames. I bound out of bed without saying anything to Mrs. Bowser, and as I come downstairs I find the cellar ablaze. It is from the cook's carelessness as she brought up coal for the morning. I seize the extinguisher and come dashing down, and, though it appears as if no human power can stay the conflagration, I tackle it and have it out in twenty seconds. I will now light the papers and show you how the thing works."

As the papers were alight he rushed upstairs after the extinguisher. A minute later he reappeared with it strapped to his back and the nozzle in his hand.

He had meant to keep very cool and do the thing beautifully, but he grew excited over it, and as he was met by a volume of smoke he lost his head and footing at the same time.

With a whoop and a yell he fell forward down stairs and rolled over and over to the cellar bottom. As he rolled the extinguisher tried to extinguish, but instead of the stream striking the flames it played on Mr. Bowser's head and feet and body, on the ceiling above and the walls around, on the women who tried to rush forward and help him up.

The pile of papers blazed, and the smoke poured out of the windows, and it wasn't thirty seconds before some one was pounding at the front door and yelling "Fire!"

Mrs. Bowser and the cook dodged the fire and the extinguisher and fled upstairs, but it was too late. A score of people came crowding in as soon as the door was opened, and without asking questions they dived down into the kitchen and snatched up anything that would hold water.

Mr. Bowser had got up by this time and had gained control of the squirter, but he couldn't get upstairs for the people who were throwing down water. As he yelled and shouted and raved an engine came rattling up, a hose nozzle was thrust into an open window, and during the next five minutes three hundred barrels of ice cold water gushed into the cellar.

Everything, including Mr. Bowser, was afloat and soaked and chilled to the marrow when Mrs. Bowser finally made the over-zealous populace understand the situation.

Then Mr. Bowser was hauled out of the window by a fireman, and while Mrs. Bowser and the cat stood on the steps above and the populace crowded round, the fireman held the fire statistician up against the wall and called him seventeen kinds of a fool and added that he ought to be drowned like a rat in a tub.

Five minutes later Mr. Bowser stood in his own front hall, with the door shut after him, and the crowd dispersed. He was soaked and limp and smoke-begrimed and half-scared to death, but he remembered his dignity.

"Well, the incipient conflagration has been extinguished," observed Mrs. Bowser as she looked him over.

"It is extinguished!" he hoarsely replied. "Yes, woman, the incipient conflagration has not only been extinguished, but you have been extinguished with it!"

"Then it was all my fault, was it?"

"A put up job on me from start to finish. Woman, I go upstairs to change my clothes. Do not follow me to offer explanations or assistance or to finish your work by stabbing me in the back! I know you at last—at last—and—and—"

And he pulled himself up step by step, and he halted on every step to point his finger at her and nod his head.

He meant by that the most dire revenge a human being can conjure up, but she only sighed and wiped up the puddles of water left behind him.

M. Quad.

Next Week: "He experiments with a boon to all Mankind."

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The Peninsular War 1808-1813.

It was an evil day for Napoleon when, in pursuance of his design for reducing Europe to a state of vassalage he resolved on expelling the effete and incapable Bourbons from Spain, and substituting a dynasty of his own.

In 1807, by exercise of the vilest arts, he extorted the abdication of King Charles, and installed in his place his brother, Joseph Bonaparte.

To support the new dynasty, Napoleon poured thousands of troops into Spain, 15,000 of which were intended for the conquest of Portugal.

The moment the Spaniards, recovering from their astonishment, began to exhibit signs of resentment, the troops were scattered over the country in order to nip all rebellion in the bud.

A fatal mistake, for when Spain rose as one man to thrust out the insolent intruder, the French, surprised and divided from each other by a difficult country, every province of which was a natural fortress, found themselves confronted by bands of guerillas, whose mode of fighting was admirably adapted to the country.

Accustomed to regard themselves as invincible, the French were so exasperated at the numerous defeats they experienced that more troops were sent out, and a determined effort made to subjugate the country.

But Britain, ever on the side of the weak, resolved that Spain should not be crushed, and in 1808 dispatched two expeditions to the assistance of the patriots: one under Sir Arthur Wellesley of 9,000 men; the other being led by the ill-fated Sir John Moore, and consisting of 10,000 men.

Soon after his landing, the Conqueror of Waterloo inflicted a severe defeat on Marshal Junot at Vimeria; but the forward movement which Wellesley contemplated was arrested by order of the Government at home. Accordingly, General Wellesley returned to England, and his army was joined to that of General Moore, who now found himself at the head of 28,000 men.

Double that number would not have stayed the disaster which followed.

Napoleon, on hearing of Vimeria, had flown to Spain with huge reinforcements. Quickly re-taking Madrid, he hurried in pursuit of Sir John Moore.

The British officers besought Sir John to fight, but Napoleon had at least 60,000 men, so he retreated to the coast, at his heels being Napoleon, who hoped, by checking the advance, to bring on a general engagement. But the rear-guard did its duty so well that the little army reached Corunna in safety.

Here it was that, to prevent his embarkation from being molested, Sir John Moore was forced to fight. What the result would have been had Napoleon commanded in person it is impossible to say. The threatening attitude of Austria called him to Paris on the eve of the fight. The battle of Corunna was a victory for our troops, but it cost us the life of Sir John Moore.

Britain being now thoroughly roused, Sir Arthur Wellesley was placed in command of a new expedition, 62,000 strong.

After cleansing Portugal of the enemy, the great British general contrived by a most masterly move-

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ment in 1809 to cross the Douro, despite the opposition of Marshal Soult.

Relying on the co-operation of the Spanish generals, the British then pushed on, and after persuading the Spanish Commander Cuesta to relinquish command of his army, he threw the combined forces at Marshal Victor at Tallavera.

The British numbered 53,000, of whom only 19,000 were Englishmen, whilst General Victor had under him 43,000 foot, 7,000 cavalry, and eighty guns. As the French had all the advantages attaching to superior forces when attacking, we were at first steadily pushed back.

The British, of course, took no notice of so trifling a matter, the day being still young, but to the Spaniards the situation seemed so pregnant with disaster that they began to waver. When a squadron of French horse appeared on their flank they ignominiously, after firing one irregular volley, fled.

By this time Wellington had come to see that the surest way of weakening Napoleon was to act on the defensive. Accordingly, he retreated into Portugal, fortified the famous lines of Torres Vedras, and prepared a campaign which was destined to drive the French out of Spain.

Napoleon in Paris, knowing nothing of the deep-laid plans of the "Sepoy General," as he called him, was furious that his marshals and their 400,000 men had failed to crush and expel the British.

Messina having taken Almeida, and Ciudad Rodrigo, marched at the head of 60,000 men into Portugal. Soult, with even a larger force, declared his intention of driving us into the sea; but when he reached the lines of Torres Vedras he paused, hesitated, and retreated, an example which was presently followed by Messina, but not till he had fought—and well fought, too—the battle of Fuentes d'Ormore.

French historians claim this battle as a victory, which is strange, considering that on the very night it was fought Messina retreated. For this behaviour he was replaced by Marmont. The British, it should be remembered, were greatly outnumbered; but it is by no means certain that, had the marshals been willing to forego their jealousies and hatreds, and combine their forces, France would have triumphed.

Be this as it may, Napoleon at this juncture made a fatal mistake. Believing that Wellesley was much weaker than he really was, he ordered Marmont to send a large portion of his force to Suchet, the only French marshal, we believe, who never suffered a defeat at the hands of the British.

On May 16th, 1811, was fought the battle of Albuera, which nearly ended in a victory for the French, owing to General Blake, who commanded the Spaniards, refusing to change the disposition of his troops when ordered to do so by General Beresford.

The French lancers had already pierced our lines, and defeat appeared so imminent that Beresford was about ordering a retreat, when he observed a couple of his infantry regiments marching stolidly forward to attack the impetuous French cavalry, who were also supported by infantry.

Knowing the qualities of his men, Beresford, instead of retiring, ordered some cavalry to take the French lancers and their supports in the flank. Being in dense columns, the onslaught when it came threw them into such disorder that our infantry, when they got them fairly on the move, literally pushed them off the field at the point of the bayonet. Being by this time tired out they sat down and ate their supper in sight of the astonished French, who were, however, too exhausted to again attack.

Soult declared that there was no chance of beating such troops, despite the mistakes of our generals, and so ordered a retreat.

Wellington, whose confidence in Beresford had been shaken, returned from the north and conducted the siege of Ciudad in person. He had intended to subdue the place by regular approaches, but hearing that Marmont was on the march, he decided to breach the walls and trust to an assault.

As soon as a couple of entrances had been made, the governor was summoned to surrender. Refusing, an attack was ordered from three points. Filling in the ditches which surrounded the fortress, our men rushed forward.

The French fought with the most desperate valour, but although they managed to hold one of the breaches, the British succeeded in storming the other. Even after the contending forces reached the streets the French charged again and again, but the stubbornness of our wonderful infantry would not be denied. We ought to have retreated, but as we wouldn't the French had no choice but to capitulate.

The capture of Ciudad, which ranks amongst the most brilliant exploits of our Army, cost us dear. It is true that when we did get inside we slew 300 of the foe and took 1,500 prisoners, beside 150 guns, and stores, but the storming of the breaches lessened our forces by 226 killed and 1,084 wounded, to say nothing of two generals who were shot in the street fighting.

Wellington now began his advance north, and Marmont, having received reinforcements, attacked him at Salamanca. The battle commenced by Marmont sending round his left wing to take us in the rear. Wellington allowed them to go just far enough to render the intervention of the main body impossible, and then, wheeling his whole force round, fell upon the division and annihilated it.

Marmont, who went to its assistance, was wounded, and General Clausel, on whom the command devolved, tried to retrieve the fortunes of the day by an attack on our centre. But Wellington's eagle eye had foreseen this move and he had his reserves ready, who, arriving quite fresh, greeted the furious onslaught of the French with cries of derision.

When the French began to retreat, we followed them with such expedition that the entire army was nearly driven into the river. This was a most complete victory.

By the time Salamanca was fought, the British army, flushed with victory, had so grown to regard themselves and their commander as invincible, that it is doubtful whether even the genius of Napoleon himself could have withstood the valour of our troops.

Wellington, it is needless to say, received a most enthusiastic welcome on entering Madrid.

Leaving the Spanish army to protect the capital against the Emperor Joseph's return, he invested the town of Burgos, an obstacle to the operations he contemplated.

Such was the confidence of our men, that a large party, acting without orders, actually assaulted the town before a breach was made, and were, as might be expected, repulsed.

The second assault, which took place after a breach had been made by the explosion of a mine, failed, because the storming party lost their way.

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Drawn by] [*Lawson Wood.*

When they had all been chased out of the houses a desperate fight took place in the streets.

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A third repulse was caused by the stupendous vanity of the storming party, who in a most vainglorious manner, leisurely sauntered up to the breach and were promptly shot down.

A fourth attempt met with no better success and the men were nerving themselves for a fifth attack, upon what was, after all, an extremely small place, when Wellington suddenly abandoned the siege because he heard that General Souham with 45,000 men was rapidly approaching. Soult also was marching in his rear from Madrid with 60,000 more. In his retreat to Ciudad Rodrigo Wellington lost 9,000 men. Nothing like this number would have fallen had not the men become demoralised by their failure at Burgos. They committed the wildest excesses on the march, and were scarcely ever sober.

But Wellington did not remain long inactive, and soon the curtain was raised on the last act of that drama which was to end in the fall of Napoleon.

Every available man having been pressed into the army with which Russia was invaded, Wellington's calculations were not to be upset by the armies opposed to him being unexpectedly reinforced.

He, moreover, opened the campaign of 1813 with an army, including Spanish and Portuguese, quite as large as that of the French combined, viz., 160,000 men. To make sure of his prey, however, he seized the passes of the Pyrenees and thus cut the French communications.

But if this disturbed the French, a series of masterly manœuvres by which he forced all the armies in front of him to abandon their positions and retreat, so disconcerted the marshals that King Joseph now became seriously alarmed. A panic seizing the Court, the roads leading northwards became so blockaded with courtiers and their baggage that it was with difficulty the French army reached Vittoria without disaster.

On the plain of Vittoria, a huge expanse eight miles long by ten miles wide, King Joseph drew up his army. His aim was to so dispose his forces that he could keep open his communication both with Madrid and France.

Wellington could cut all the remaining communications with France, but to do so he would have to swing his left right round, thus severing his connection with his base in Portugal. It was a hazardous thing to do, but Wellington risked it.

The French drew up their army on the crest of some ridges at the rear of the plain. It extended over eight miles, and the bridges across the river in front were commanded by sixty pieces of artillery.

The French army expressed itself confident of winning; but the Court could not have been so hopeful, for the roads for miles in the rear of the army were crowded with vehicles of every description, containing the civilian parasites, their wives and families, goods and plunder.

The two armies were so well matched that the chances appeared equal.

At daybreak, June 21st, our right wing commenced the battle by attacking the heights above Puebla, directly in their front. Leaving the Spaniards in possession, Sir Rowland Hill, with the object of clearing the ridges on his side, ran his men across a valley in face of a heavy fire, and stormed the village of Sutigana.

As Sutigana was the key of the position, the French weakened their centre to recover the village.

Wellington, who had anticipated this, at once launched a strong force against the French centre, which would of a certainty have collapsed but for the aid rendered by their artillery. So destructive was their fire that Wellington held back his men till a couple of brigades of guns he had sent for, had silenced the French artillery.

Again advancing, our troops forced back the French centre till the village of Arty was reached. Here they made such a determined stand that Picton and his daredevils were sent for. Picton, who was always reserved for work requiring the clearing out of an enemy who fought behind walls or hedges, at once set to work to make a clean sweep of the lot.

When they had all been chased out of the houses, a desperate fight took place in the streets.

The reinforcements sent to the French were of no avail. Picton's devils steadily forced their way up the village street till they got to the open country, when the French broke and ran.

The French plan of battle now began to betray serious evidence of weakness.

King Joseph insisted on a whole corps being detached to occupy the village of Gamara and so secure his communications with Bayonne. Our right wing had now so effectually driven the French left into their centre, that the various corps, losing formation, presently dissolved into a confusion which prevented them from executing any offensive movement.

Losing heart, the detachments holding a few remaining heights offered but a feeble resistance to our men. Despairing of the issue the retreat was sounded, and away went the French down the Pampluna road with the British in hot pursuit. The French were joined on the road by a large body of reserves who had not been engaged.

It was fortunate they were at hand, for the fugitives presently encountered the force lying in wait on the banks of the Zadora to intercept them.

The struggle waged at this spot was of indescribable ferocity.

Knowing that unless they broke through they would be taken in the rear by the British who were close behind, the French made a supreme effort and fighting in really grand style forced a passage. Never was victory more complete.

The French lost all their guns but two, and all their munitions of war.

Indeed, so precipitate did their retreat become, that the soldiers outstripped the vehicles of the Court and 2,000 of these fell into our hands. The spoils, in fact, were so vast that, when the soldiers held an auction of the booty the day after, the boards on which the booty was exposed for sale, extended for over two miles.

Our losses as usual were heavy—heavy because carrying enemies' positions always results in heavy loss of life. Our dead and wounded exceeded 5,000, of which 3,574 were British.

The French admitted to having lost over 7,000.

With the battle of Vittoria, the Peninsular War may be said to end.

Our matchless infantry, who, as Sir W. Napier has said, could go anywhere, marched 600 miles, fought over a dozen pitched battles, captured two large fortresses, finally driving out of Spain 130,000 of the best soldiers France ever produced.

Next week: **The Campaign in the Pyrenees and South of France (1813—14).**

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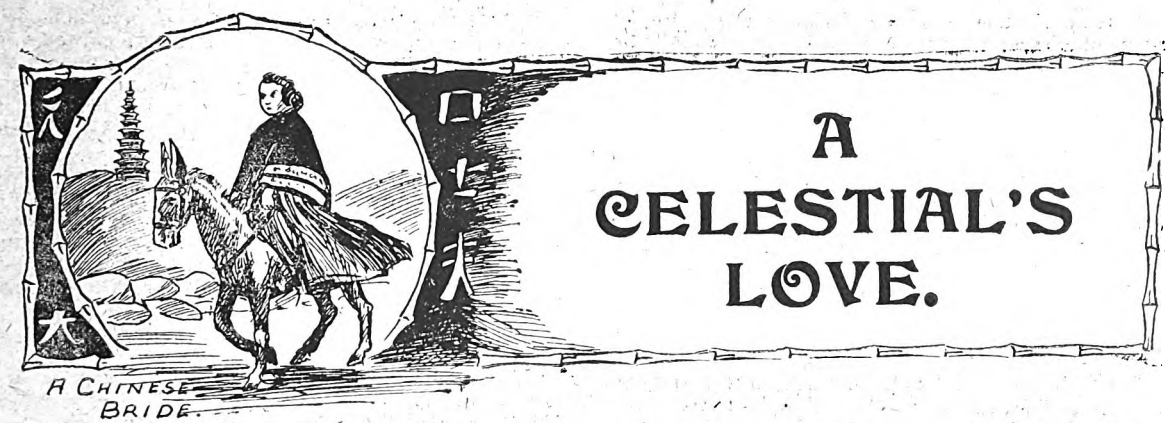

A CHINESE BRIDE.

A CELESTIAL'S LOVE.

SARAH BARKER had told Milly Hunt a wonderful tale, and Milly, to whom it had been communicated in strict confidence, as a choice bit of "exclusive" news, of course immediately proceeded to impart it to all the other girls in the laundry.

Latimer Road, Notting Hill, is not famous for excessive refinement in the vernacular of its residents.

The "wash-tub" and the "ironing-board" do not appear to be conducive to a peculiarly high standard of either speech or manners; so t' at when Milly had distributed her budget, it is not surprising that its reception was choicely expressive, not to say flowery.

"Wot! the yaller, dirty lot! a-comin' to do our work? Wash!—why they doesn't wash theirselves. Yah!"

"I tells yer they're not 'a-comin'! they're come!" insisted Milly Hunt, with the superior air of one who knew all about it.

"Then we'll duck 'em in 'ot suds, an' striten 'em out wiv' a flat-iron arterwuds!" cried Susy Maxted, a carroty-headed young amazon, and she certainly looked quite capable of doing it too.

"What O!" screamed the others in deafening chorus.

It was the dinner-hour, and their lungs were their own.

Now Susy Maxted, although a laundry girl, was a born leader in her little world, and by common consent was universally recognised as adviser-in-chief in all matters requiring arbitrative ability.

Disputes (and they were many and frequent), quarrels (mostly the result of feminine jealousy), courting questions (as innumerable as subtle), were referred to her for judgment and woe to the girl who refused to obey the order of the Court.

In this particular instance she was more than ordinarily authoritative, for did not the threatened invasion of the detested Chinaman mean for all of them lower wages and harder work?

"Why! they lives, I've heerd, on a farden a day!" said Susy contemptuously. "If they gets their foot in, where shall we be? In the street or the workus! An' I don't mean to be in neither, bet yer life on that!"

"Good old Susy!" screamed the chorus.

"'Ere! will yer leave 'em to me? I'll tackle 'em!" and the aggressively upward tilt of her impudent little nose, the wicked snap of her fingers, testified to the "goodwill," at any rate, of Susy's intentions. "No! I shan't tell yer what I'm a-goin' to do—I'm on my own this trip. Milly Hunt; if you an' Sally Barker tries ter find out my little bit, I'll mark yer, an' don't yer furgit it!"

That evening there might have been seen in the neighbourhood of Willesden a young woman of strong build and determined manner, loitering up and down the streets of that suburb.

Her appearance gave the impression that she was on conquest bent; as in a sense she was.

The enormous be-feathered and be-flowered hat; the startling bright blue skirt; the scarlet jacket with big pearl buttons (a costume, as a rule, donned only when the male enemy was to be encountered), implied, apparently, that the wearer had matter of unusual importance on hand.

It was a beautiful summer evening, and Susy would, under ordinary circumstances, have revelled in it, according to her lights, but her present business was extraordinary, and forbade frivolity.

For more than an hour did she watch the gates of a certain old house, at the back of which had lately been erected two or three long, low-pitched wooden sheds.

Lights gleamed in every window, especially did the sheds aforesaid send up from their open skylights not only beams of light, but dense clouds of steam.

Susy watched all this with the silent sleuthy keenness of a cat.

Watch as she would, however, nothing human or otherwise passed in or out the gates. To all intents and purposes, it might have been an enchanted place, where the work was done by invisible hands.

Thus patiently waiting, Susy, turning her head a moment to gaze up the long, dreary-looking road, saw something or someone approaching in the far distance.

The house no longer had attraction for her, her eyes were fixed upon the slowly nearing object.

She felt that, whatever it was, she must go to meet it, and with a defiant settling of her hat, a twist of her side fringes, Susy swung up the street.

Wang-Ho, tired, dusty, and barely recovered from the terrors of shipboard, thought the scarlet and blue vision advancing toward him to be the most beautiful and entrancing he had ever beheld. Small-footed, almond-eyed houris of Pekin had he seen and worshipped by the score, but here was a blaze of golden-flamed hair, a picture of pink and white loveliness that fairly overcame him at the very first sight of it.

Hungry, thirsty, he could yet lift his "Celestial" soul to an ecstatic contemplation of this oncoming daughter of the "foreign devil."

Wang-Ho was young and guileless, and quite inexperienced in the ways and wiles of the English girl. She was to him an absolutely unknown quantity.

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His admiration did not decrease upon newer acquaintance; rather did it grow with wonderful rapidity.

Presently Wang-Ho was conscious of an interruption in his progress.

At the particular spot where it occurred, there were no houses, but plots of waste building land on both sides of the road.

Too, they had the path to themselves, for in either direction other pedestrians there were none.

"Say! are yer a-goin' there?" inquired Susy sharply, standing full in front of Wang-Ho, and pointing with her thumb over her shoulder to the house she had been so persistently watching.

Wang-Ho only grinned, nodded his head in an inconsequent, half-vacuous way, and clasped tighter to his breast, with both his lean yellow hands, the little blue bundle he carried.

"Oh! yer are! are yer! Though yer might be civil enough ter answer a person as speaks civil ter yer. Well, just yer mind wot I'm a-goin' ter tell yer, turn round an' go back agin ter 'Ong-Kong or wotever the place is as yer've cum from! Yer ain't wanted 'ere!"

Wang-Ho had a dim indefinite sort of idea that this beautiful creature was angry with him; was in some way wishful to bar his way to the laundry whither he was bound.

"You allee same plitty gel, velly plitty," he said at length, his mind running only upon this, to him, novel sensation of love at first sight.

"'Ere, chuck it! None o' that! Wot d'yer takeme for?"

"Allee same plitty, velly plitty," he repeated, smiling his most fetching smile.

"If yer says that ag'in, I'll land yer one! I ain't 'ere ter listen ter yer fooleries," said Susy with an ominous shake of her broad shoulders. "See that place?"—pointing again to the house up the road—"Well, sure as yer goes there, I'll cut off yer pigtail, and make yer swaller it, there!"

With that, Susy swung him round, gave him a by no means gentle push, and walked away.

Wang-Ho watched her, as she stepped out ahead of him, and, instead of turning round again, and pursuing his journey according to his original programme, followed in her wake.

From that moment Susy Maxted had no peace. Dinner-times, evening-times, it was always the same; there was Wang-Ho, smiling, patient, waiting for her, until, what with the chaff of the other girls, and her own wrath, she was on the brink of doing something that would cause trouble to somebody.

One day, a little gutter-snipe delivered into her hands a piece of rice-paper, inscribed with Chinese characters, and which the boy averred had been given him by Wang-Ho to pass on to her.

He knew it was for her, he said, because "Chiney" had told him that it was for "Plitty gel—hair allee same this." "This" being the broad red border round the missive.

This occurred in the middle of the day, and Susy, hot-tempered by nature, and now at white heat almost, determined to put an end to the affair that very night, and at any cost.

Sure enough, at the usual hour, at the corner of the nearest turning was Wang-Ho.

His shoes were spotless; his shirt and jacket without a wrinkle; while his eternal smile was, if anything, even more beatific than aforetime.

By permission of the forewoman, Susy came out a few minutes before the other girls, and without a moment's hesitation marched rapidly up to the expectant "Celestial."

"D'yer see that?" she said to him—not loudly, but so as if she meant it, that he could not fail to understand her drift—first flourishing the offending 'love-letter' in his face, and then dropping it in the muddy roadway, and dancing upon it. "D'yer see that? D'yer think I wants yer nasty 'tensions, or yer cumpany? Take that! an' that!"—giving him a couple of resounding slaps on either cheek—"If yer comes 'ere agin, a-follering of me, I'll kill yer! I will—s'elp me!"

Wang-Ho saw the dethronement of his idol with sorrow and regret; but his smile was still there, and without doubt it was this latter peculiarity which roused in Susy such irritation, bitter wrath and vengeful desire.

But her purpose was served. He never troubled her more.

* * * * *

Some little while afterwards the police were called one night to a certain notorious opium den in the East End to remove the body of a young Chinaman, who had evidently succumbed to an over-dose of the deadly drug.

On examination there was found upon him wrapped carefully away in the inner folds of his clothing a small piece of dirty paper, with rudely scrawled upon it that which was probably designed for a woman's head.

The policemen laughed. They generally, upon their own confession, do laugh at such things, but all the same in this case there were the elements of something strangely pathetic. It was a little bit of human nature, and human nature, be it white or yellow, is a very real thing.

Wang-Ho had his little heart-flutter, and—it came to nothing.

Susy Maxted will, possibly, some day mate with a man who will swear at her and knock her about; and who shall say what the end will be? RALPH ENDERBY.

YOUR HEAD AND SHOULDERS ONLY.

IF you have a relative who has passed away either at home in peace or abroad in war, send his photograph—which you probably cherish—and we will enlarge it to a beautiful India ink and crayon portrait, 15in. by 12in., mounted on plate sunk mount 24in. by 19in.

Relatives of soldiers at the front may obtain one of these enlargements for 6s.

Other photographs will be enlarged for 7s.

You will certainly get a genuine bargain by availing yourself of this offer. The enlargements can be made from any photograph, large or small, tin-types, or any kind of glass picture, provided the print is legible. All the enlargements are of the head and shoulders only.

What to do.

Write your name and address plainly in ink on a slip of paper, also on the back of the portrait you are sending us. Get a postal order for 7s. (if the photograph be that of a soldier or sailor get a 6s. postal order). Place all of these in an envelope, or make a securely packed parcel of them and address it to the PORTRAIT EDITOR, *Pearson's Weekly*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

A Reduction of Threepence

on each enlargement, when the order is for two or more from the same photograph, will be made.

Orders will be treated in rotation.

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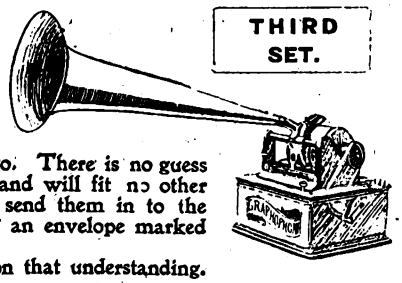
"QUICK CHANGE" PUZZLES.

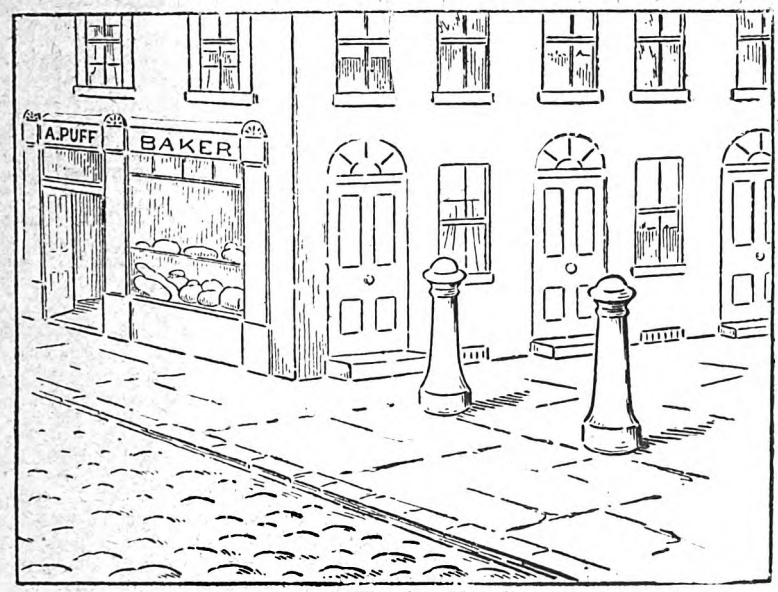
First Prize	*A Magnificent Graphophone.*
Second Prize	*£2.*
Six Prizes of	*10s. each.*

THIRD SET.



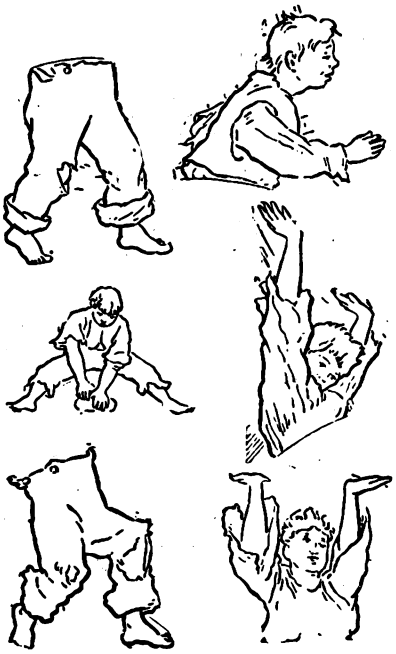
On this page you will find two drawings exactly alike, and a number of parts of figures. What you have to do is to cut out the parts of the figures, leaving a small margin, and paste them on the picture in the way they should go. There is no guess work about it. Each part of the figures should be pasted on a certain spot, and will fit no other spot. When you have pasted up your picture, pin the three sets together, and send them in to the Editor, "Short Stories," Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., in an envelope marked "Quick Change," to arrive not later than Thursday, January 10th.

Competitors must abide by the Editor's final decision, and may enter only on that understanding.



Football.

"Cartwheels."



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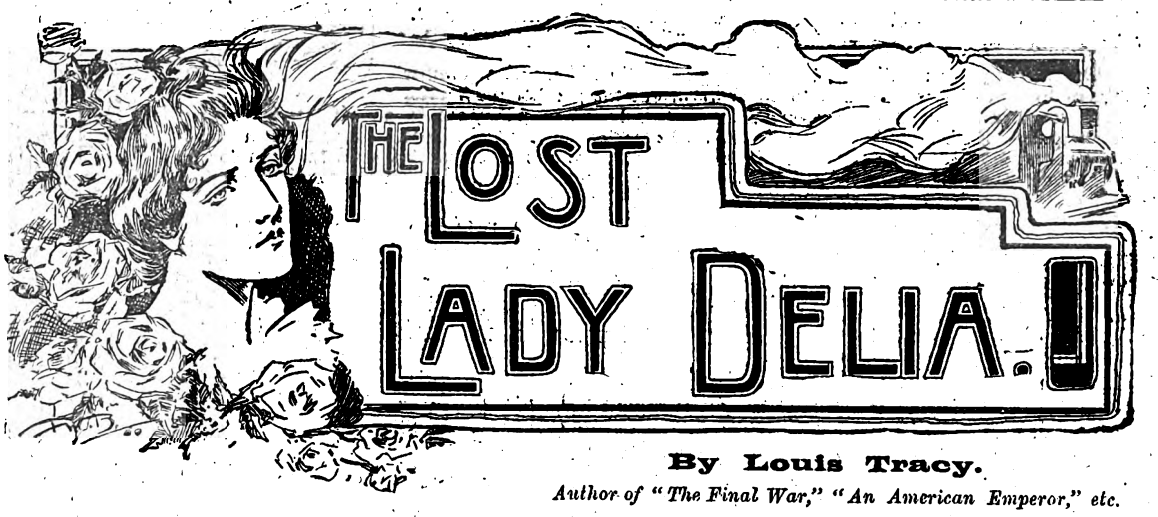
NEW SERIAL STORY. START TO-DAY.



By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

SUMMARY.

LADY DELIA LYLE leaves her house one foggy November afternoon, and is seen at Victoria Station, on the Underground Railway, by Mr. Reginald Brett, a barrister friend of her husband, who gets her ticket and puts her in the train for Richmond, where she says she is going to see her sister.

She does not return home at night, so in the morning her husband, Sir Charles Lyle, wires to her at her sister's, only to find that she has not been there.

Later in the day Brett happens to meet Sir Charles, and tells him that he saw Lady Delia on the previous evening, and is surprised to learn that nothing has been heard of her since.

After some days have passed, without bringing any news of Lady Delia, Sir Charles puts the matter into the hands of detectives, Inspector Winter taking charge of the case.

Brett also promises to do all he can, and he finds out that Lady Delia, on the night of her disappearance, instead of going to Richmond, alighted at Sloane Square, and went to a block of flats called Raleigh Mansions.

Towards the end of the month the body of a woman, evidently murdered, is found wedged beneath a drain-pipe in the Thames at Putney, and, though Sir Charles does not identify the body, Brett imagines it to be that of Lady Delia. Shortly after this discovery Lady Delia's maid, Jane Harding, disappears.

Brett now starts investigations at Raleigh Mansions, and he fixes on two residents there as being likely to have been connected with Lady Delia. These are a Mr. Sydney H. Pyne, who is not at present in residence, and a Mrs. Hilmer, whom he finds to be Pyne's sister, and this lady Brett takes to the theatre one evening.

Among one of the actresses who had a walking on part, Brett notices Jane Harding, and at the close of the performance, after seeing Mrs. Hilmer to her carriage, he follows her to a restaurant. She tells him that she has had a little money left her, which has enabled her to go on the stage.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE CITY.

MESSRS. DODGE AND CO., of Leadenhall-street, possessed business premises of greater pretensions than Brett had pictured to himself from Mrs. Hilmer's description of their transactions with her brother.

Not only were their offices commodious and well situated, but a liberal display of gold lettering, intermingled with the official brass-plates marking the registered offices of many companies, gave evidence of some degree of importance—whether fictitious or otherwise Brett could not determine, as he scrutinised the exterior of the building on the following morning.

Moreover, workmen were even then busy in substituting the title "Dodge, Son, and Co., Ltd.," for "Messrs. Dodge and Company," the suggestive nature of the latter designation having perhaps proved a stumbling-block in the way of the guileless investor.

When the barrister entered the office, a busy place, with many clerks, and adorned with gigantic maps of the Rand, West Australia, Cripple Creek, and Klondike, he asked for "Mr. Dodge."

His card procured him ready admission. He was shown into an elaborately upholstered apartment of considerable size. At the farther end, seated in front of a gorgeous American desk, was a young man who ostentatiously finished a letter and then motioned the barrister to a seat.

Brett was curious on the question of the age of the head of the firm.

"Are you Mr. Dodge, or the son?" he said, with the utmost gravity.

The other man was taken aback by this unexpected method of opening the conversation. It annoyed him.

"I am the representative of the firm, sir, and able to deal fully with your business, whatever it may be," he replied.

"No doubt. But it will simplify matters if I know exactly to whom I am addressing myself."

After an uneasy shuffling in his seat—he could not guess what this keen-faced, earnest-eyed lawyer might want—the representative of Messrs. Dodge, Son, and Co. (Limited) explained that he was Dodge, and the name of the firm had been adopted for general purposes.

"Then there is no 'son,' I take it?"

"Yes, there is, sir"—this with a snort of anger.

"How old is he?"

"What the dickens has that got to do with it? Will you kindly tell me what you want, sir, as my time is fully occupied?"

"Just now I want to know how old the 'son' is?"

This calm persistence irritated Mr. Dodge beyond endurance.

"Three years, confound you, and his sister is four months. Can I oblige you with any more details concerning my family affairs?"

Having purposely raised his man to boiling point by this harmless method of examination, Reggie went on to tackle

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the real business in hand. He was quite sure that a financial sharper in a temper was far more likely to blurt out the truth than if he were approached in a matter-of-fact manner.

"To begin with," he explained, never taking his eyes off the furious face of Mr. Dodge, "I have called to ask for information with regard to your dealings with Mr. Sydney H. Pyne, of Raleigh Mansions, Sloane-square."

"I never heard of him in my life. You have evidently come to the wrong office, Mr. Brett."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Well, nearly so. However, I can tell you in a moment, as it is impossible for me to carry every name connected with several companies in my memory."

Mr. Dodge had recovered his temper now that he saw a chance of disconcerting his caustic visitor. He touched an electric bell and told the answering youth to send Mr. Hawkins.

"My correspondence clerk," he said to Brett when Hawkins entered. "Are we in communication with any one named Sydney H. Pyne, Mr. Hawkins?"

"No, sir."

"Have you ever heard the name?"

"No, sir."

"That will do. You may go. You see you have come to the wrong shop, Mr. Brett."

"Yes, so I see."

The barrister kept looking at the back of Mr. Dodge's head, but made no move.

Mr. Dodge became puzzled.

"Now, Mr. Brett," he cried, "you know the age of my son and the extent of my information about Mr. Pyne. Is there anything else in which I may be of service?"

"Yes. You do a good deal of underwriting, mostly for the flotation of gold-mining companies?"

"Y-yes. That is a branch of our business."

"I am interested in this class of undertaking, and I was given to understand that Mr. Pyne had had some dealings with you in a similar respect for a considerable sum of money."

"The name is absolutely unknown to me."

"Of course. So I understand. I am sorry to hear it. Several clients of mine have money to invest in that way and I naturally came to a firm whose name apparently figured largely in the transactions of Mr. Pyne."

It was good for Brett to see the manner in which Mr. Dodge metaphorically kicked himself for his previous attitude. His emotion was painful. For quite an appreciable time he could not trust his sentiments to words.

At last he struggled to express himself.

"Really, Mr. Brett, if only you had put things differently. Don't you see, it rather upset me when you came in and began jawing about the youngsters. And then you spring Mr. Pyne's name on me—a man of whom I have no sort of knowledge. It must have been my firm of which your friends heard. There is absolutely no other Dodge in Leadenhall-street. Indeed, we are the only financial Dodges—that is, Messrs. Dodge, Son, and Co. (Limited) are the only name dealing with financial matters—in the City."

By this time Brett had assured himself that Mr. Dodge did not know Mr. Pyne under that name, and that if the change of name had been adopted by Mrs. Hilmer's brother to conceal himself from Dodge, it was likely to be successful.

"Anyhow, I am here, Mr. Dodge," he said cheerfully, "so I may as well enter into negotiations with you. Have you any good things in hand at this moment?"

"Some of the best. We are just waiting for the market

"Really, Mr. Brett, if only you had put things differently."

to ease a bit, and we shall have at least five splendid properties to place before the public. By the way, do you smoke?"

Brett did smoke; and Mr. Dodge produced a box of excellent cigars. Then he warmed to his work.

"Here is the prospectus of the Golden Halo Mine, capital £150,000, for which the vendors are asking £140,000 in cash, with a working capital of £10,000. The ore now in sight is estimated to produce two millions sterling, and the mine is not one-tenth developed. We are offering underwriters ten per cent. in cash, and there is not the slightest risk, as the shares will stand at a high premium within a few days after the lists——"

"It sounds most promising," said Brett; "but my principals are more interested in taking up concerns which have been already established, but in which, for want of sufficient capital, the vendors' shares have, by a process of reconstruction, come into the market. If you have anything of that kind——"

"The very thing," interrupted Dodge, excitedly. "The Springbok Mine will just suit 'em. After all is said and done, Golden Halos are a bit in the air, between you and me. But the Springbok is a genuine article. It was capitalised for a quarter of a million, and the directors went to allotment on a subscription list of about £14,000. This money has been expended, but twice the amount is necessary to properly develop the property. A call was made on the shares, but no one paid up, and there is a talk now of compulsory reconstruction. Believe me, money put into it now will yield 200 per cent. in dividends within twelve months."

"There is a whiff of scent on this trail," said Reggie to himself. He added aloud: "That looks promising. Can you give me details?"

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"By all means. Here is the original prospectus."

Brett glanced through the document, which dealt with the Springbok claims on the Rand with more candour than is usually exhibited in such compilations. Judging from the reports of several mining engineers of repute it really looked as if, this time, Mr. Dodge was speaking with some degree of accuracy.

"This reads well," said Brett. "What proportion of share capital is falling in on the reconstruction scheme?"

"I hold 50,000 shares myself," cried Dodge, "and though my money is locked up just now I am so convinced about this mine that I will manage to pay the call myself. Roughly speaking, there are 150,000 shares to be underwritten at, say, 3s. each."

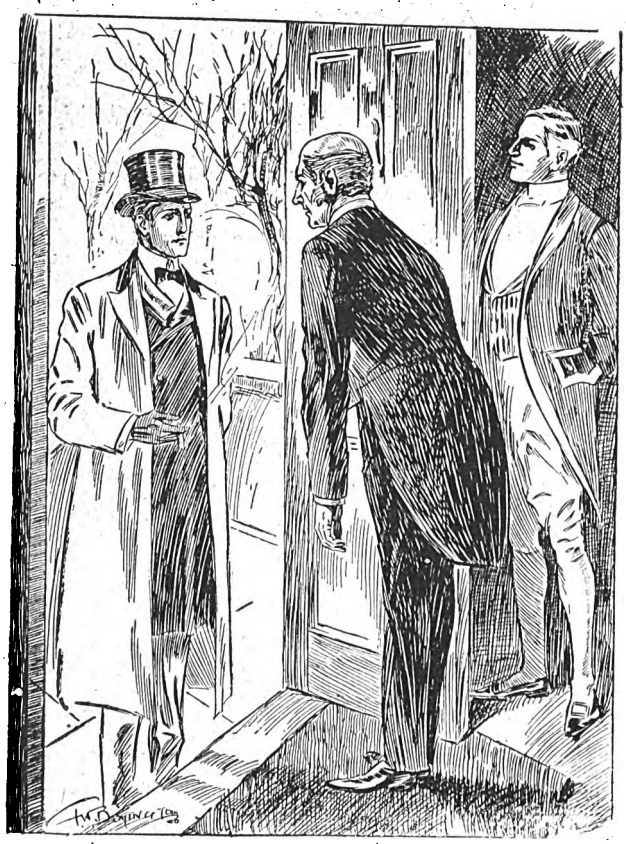
"And who are the present holders?" The barrister asked the question in the most unconcerned way imaginable, yet upon the answer depended the whole success or otherwise of this hitherto unproductive mission.

Mr. Dodge was manifestly anxious. "I take it that we are talking with a definite view to business?"

The barrister hesitated. Even in the detection of crime a man does not care to tell a deliberate lie, and Dodge's attitude so far had been candid enough. The Springbok Mine honestly looked to be a good speculative investment, so he resolved to place the proposition before one or two friends of his who dealt with similar matters, and who were fully able to look after their own interests.

"Yes," he said, "I am here for that purpose. If my principals like this thing they will go in for it."

"Then here is the vendors' list," said Mr. Dodge, taking a foolscap sheet from a drawer.



"Sir Charles left yesterday for Bournemouth, sir.'

Reggie perused it nonchalantly. His quick eyes took in each name and address out of half-a-dozen, and rejected all as being in no way connected with the man whose antecedents he was seeking.

Yet, where possible, he left nothing to chance.

"Have you any objection to a copy of these being made?" he said.

Mr. Dodge hummed doubtfully.

"You see," went on the barrister, "it is best to be quite candid with people whom you ask to invest in risky, if apparently high-promising, ventures. I presume these gentlemen are moneyless. If so it is a factor in favour of your scheme. Should any of them be men of means my principals would naturally ask why they did not themselves underwrite the shares."

Mr. Dodge was convinced. "From that point of view," he cried emphatically, "they are above suspicion. Jot them down, sir."

Reggie armed himself with the requisite documents, and they parted with mutual good wishes. It was only after reflection that Mr. Dodge saw how remarkably little he had got out of the interview. "He was a jolly sharp chap," communed the company promoter. "I wonder what he was really after. And who the dickens is Mr. Sydney H. Pyne? Anyhow, the Springbok business is quite above board. How *can* I raise the wind for my little lot?"

If Mr. Brett had sufficiently probed Mr. Dodge's holding, he would have been saved much future perturbation. But clever as he was, he did not know all the methods of financial juggling practised by experts on the Stock Exchange.

A hansom brought him quickly west to Portman Square. In fulfilment of his promise he was about to tell Sir Charles Lyle the salient features of his recent discoveries.

When the door of Wensley House opened to him, the butler, Thompson, who happened to be in the hall, anticipated the footman's answer to Brett's inquiry.

"Sir Charles left yesterday for Bournemouth, sir. He was that hovercome by the weather an' his trouble that he has gone for a few days' rest at the seaside. If you called, sir, I was to tell you he would be glad to see you there should you find it convenient to run down. And, Mr. Brett, sir, you'll never guess who came 'ere this morning as bold as brass."

"Miss Jane Harding?"

"Now, how on earth can you hit upon things that way, sir? It was her, her very self. And you ought to 'ave seen her airs. 'Thompson,' sez she, 'is Sir Chawles at 'ome.' 'No, he isn't,' sez I; 'but you're wanted at the polis station.' She was in a keb, an' she 'ad asked a butcher's boy to pull the bell, so 'im an' the cabby larfed. 'Thompson,' she said, very red in the face, 'I'll 'ave you dismissed for your imperence.' An' off she went. Did you ever hear anythink like it, sir?"

"No, Thompson; Miss Harding is certainly a cool hand."

Brett walked to his chambers, and his stroll through the parks was engrossed by one subject of thought. It was not Mrs. Hilmer, nor Pyne, nor Dodge that troubled him. What puzzled him more than all else was the "imperence" of Jane Harding.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOTEL DU CERCLE.

BRETT did not go to Bournemouth.

He left London by the night mail, and after a wearisome journey of thirty-six hours, found himself in the garden courtyard of the Hotel du Cercle at Monte Carlo.

Refreshed by a bath and an excellent *déjeuner* Brett decided to go quietly to work and search the visitors' book for himself without asking any questions. The Hotel du Cercle was a popular resort, and it took him some time,

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largely devoted to the elucidation of hieroglyphic signatures, before he was quite satisfied that no one even remotely suggestive of the name of Sydney H. Pyne had recorded his presence in the hotel since the first week in November.

The barrister, for the first time, began to doubt Mrs. Hilmer. Twice had her statements not been verified by the facts. It was with an expression of keen annoyance at his own folly in trusting so much to a favourable impression that Brett turned to the hotel clerk to ask if the name Sydney H. Pyne was familiar to him.

The courteous Frenchman screwed up his forehead into a reflective frown before he answered: "But yes, monsieur. Me, I have not seen the gentleman, but he exists. There have been letters—two, three letters."

"Ah, letters! Has he received them?"

The attendant examined a green baize-covered board, decorated with diamonds of tape, in which was stuck an assortment of letters, mostly addressed to American tourists.

"They were here. They have gone! Then he has taken them."

"Yes," cried Brett; "but surely you know something about him?"

"Nothing. This hall is open to all the world."

"Do you tell me that anyone can come here and take off any letters that may be stuck in that rack?"

"Will the gentleman be pleased to consider? Many persons give their address here days and weeks before they come to arrive. Some persons, in the manner of Monte Carlo, do not wish their names to be known of everybody. We cannot distinguish. We do not allow the address of the hotel to be used improperly, if we know it; but there are no complaints."

The barrister did not argue the matter further. He only said: "Perhaps you can help me thus far, as I am very anxious to meet Mr. Pyne. About how long is it since the last letter came for him?"

"But, certainly. It came yesterday. It was re-addressed from some place in London. If possible, with the next one I will keep watch for Mr. Pyne."

So Mrs. Hilmer had not misled him. The so-called Pyne was in Monte Carlo, but had possibly disguised himself under another name. Again did Brett consult the hotel register, this time with the aid of the vendors' list in the Springbok Mine, but without result.

There was nothing for it but to familiarise himself with Monte Carlo and its *habitués*, awaiting developments in the chase of Pyne. In January, when London alternates between fog and sleet, it is not an intolerable thing to remain in forced idleness amidst the sunshine and flowers of the Riviera. There are two ways of "doing" Monte Carlo. You may live riotously, lose your substance at the Casino, and go home on a free ticket supplied by the proprietors of the gambling saloons, or you may enjoy to the utmost the keen air, magnificent scenery, fine promenades, and excellent music—the two latter provided by the same benevolent agency.

It is needless to say which of these alternatives appealed to Reginald Brett. Being a rich man, it was of no consequence to him to lose a five-pound note in backing the red for a five minutes' bit of excitement. Being a sensible one, he then quitted the Casino and went for a stroll in the gardens.

Fashion, backed by the doctors, has decreed that no longer shall the northern littoral of the Mediterranean be the haven of rest for those afflicted with pulmonary complaints. Weak-chested and consumptive people are now banished to the windless icy altitudes of Switzerland; so of recent years a walk through Nice, Mentone, or Monte Carlo itself is not such a depressing experience as it was when every second person encountered looked to be a hopeless invalid.

A pigeon-shooting match was in progress at the base of the cliff, and, as Brett fell in with a friend who took a prominent part in local life, the two entered the club grounds to watch the contest.

At the moment a handsome, well set-up young Englishman was shooting off a tie with a Russian Count. A very pretty girl, with a delicate and refined beauty enhanced by a pleasant expression, was taking a most unfeminine interest in the slaughter of the pigeons by the Englishmen.

Her eyes spoke her thoughts. It was as if they said: "I do not want the birds to be killed, but I want a certain person to win."

Nine birds each had been grassed, and the Russian was growing impatient. The Englishman was cool, his fair backer keenly excited. The Count fired and missed his

The cynic was right. In the thirteenth round the Count alone scored.

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tenth. Up rose the Englishman's bird, and the girl could not restrain an impetuous "Now!"

So the Englishman missed also.

Amidst the buzz of comment that arose, Brett said to his companion: "What's going on?"

"This is the final tie in the International. It is a big prize, and each man has backed himself heavily. The two are Albert Mensmore and Count Bischkoff. That girl has taken all the nerve out of Mensmore. You will see that, bar accidents, he is a goner."

The cynic was right. In the thirteenth round the Count alone scored, and smiled largely in response to his antagonist's quaint congratulations. As for the girl, it was with difficulty that she restrained her tears.

"I think that we have witnessed a tragedy," said Brett's acquaintance as they walked off; and the barrister agreed with him. He was sorry for Mensmore and his pretty supporter. Mayhap the loss of the match meant a great deal to both of them.

That night he found by chance that Mensmore lived at the Hotel du Cercle. He met him in the billiard-room and tried to get him into conversation. But the young fellow was too miserable to respond to his advances. Beyond a mere civil acknowledgment of some slight act of politeness Brett could not draw him out.

Next morning he saw Mensmore again. If the man looked haggard the previous evening his appearance now was positively startling, that is, to one of Brett's keen powers of observation. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have seen that Mensmore had not slept well. Brett was assured that, for some reason, the other's brain was dominated by some overwhelming idea, and one which might eventuate in a tragic manner were it to be allowed to go on unchecked.

For some reason he took a good deal of interest in his unfortunate fellow-countryman, and determined to help him if the opportunity presented itself.

It came, with dramatic rapidity.

During dinner he noticed that Mensmore was in such a state of mental disturbance that he ate and drank with the air of one who is feverishly wasting time rather than replenishing his strength.

Soon after eight o'clock, at the hour when frequenters of the Casino go there in order to secure a seat for the evening's play, Mensmore quitted the dining-room. Brett unobtrusively followed him, and was just in time to see him enter the lift.

The barrister waited in the hall, having first secured his hat and overcoat from the bureau, where he happened to have left them.

Even whilst he noted the descending lift, in which he could see Mensmore, who had donned a light covert coat, the breast of which bulged somewhat on the left side, the hotel clerk came to him, triumphantly holding a letter.

"And now, Monsieur," cried the clerk, "we shall see what we shall see."

The missive was addressed to the mysterious Sydney H. Pyne, and had evidently been forwarded by the Sloane Square Post-Office.

With a clang the door of the lift swung open and Mensmore hastened out. Brett had to decide instantly betweeen the chance of seeing Pyne with his own eyes and pursuing the fanciful errand he had mapped out in imagination with reference to the stranger who so interested him.

"Thank you," he said to the clerk, "I am going to the Casino for an hour. You will greatly oblige me by keeping a sharp look-out for any one who claims this letter."

"Monsieur, it shall have my utmost regard."

The barrister had not erred in his surmise as to Mensmore's destination. The young man walked straight across the square and entered the grounds in which stands the famous Casino.

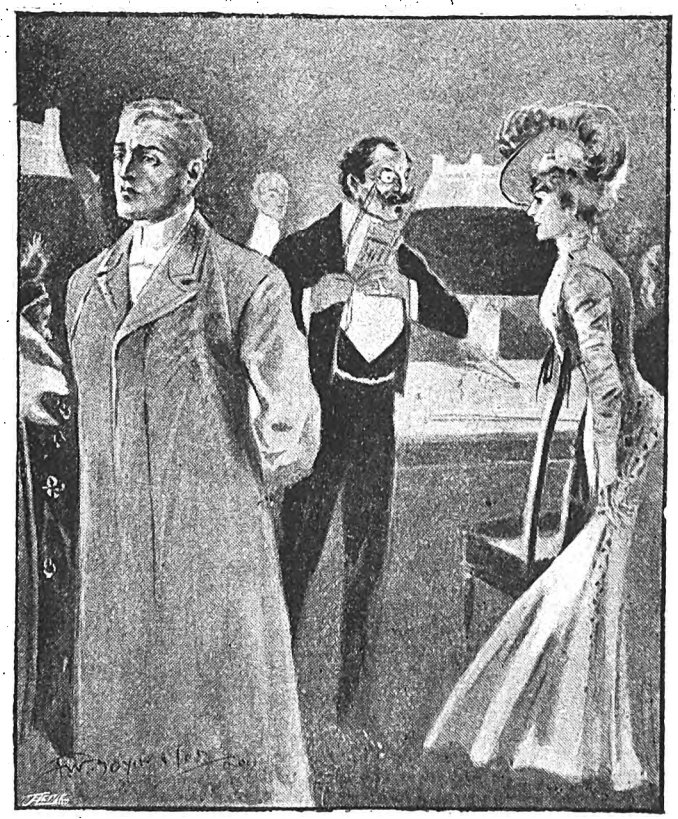
An excellent band was playing a selection from "The Geisha;" the well-kept promenades were fast filling with a fashionable throng; the silver radiance of the moon lighting up gardens, rocks, and sea might well have added the last link to the pleasant bondage that would keep any one from the gambling-saloon that night—but Mensmore heeded none of these things.

He passed the barrier, closely followed by Brett, ran up the steps, crossed the spacious foyer, and disappeared through the baize doors that guard the magnificent room in which roulette is played.

Round the centre table a fairly considerable crowd had already gathered. Several croupiers were installed on their platform seats, but there is something curiously fascinating for the gambler in the presence of others. It would seem to be an almost ridiculous thing for a man to stalk solemnly up to an empty table and stake his money on the chances of the game merely for the edification of the official in charge.

Brett entered the room soon after Mensmore, and saw the latter elbowing his way to a seat about to be vacated by a stout Spanish lady, who had rapidly lost the sum she allowed herself to stake each day.

She was one of those numerous players who bring to the Casino a certain amount daily, and systematically stop playing when they



Both men rose simultaneously, the Italian grinning at a smart Parisienne.

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have either lost their money or won a previously determined maximum.

This method, in fact, is the only one whereby even a rich individual can indulge in this costly pastime, and, at the same time, escape speedy ruin. With a fair share of luck it may be made to pay; with continuous bad fortune the loss is spread over such a period that common sense has some opportunity to rescue the victim before it is too late.

Reggie took up a position whence he could note the actions of the stranger in whom he was so interested. At first Mensmore staked nothing. He placed a small pile of gold, some £20, in front of him, and then he seemed to listen expectantly to the croupier's monotonous cry: "Vingt-sept, rouge, impair, passe," or "Dix-huit, noir, pair, manque," and so on; whilst the little ivory ball whizzed round the disc, and the long rake, with unerring skill, drew in or pushed forward the sum lost or won.

The dominant expression of Mensmore's face as he sat and listened was one of disappointment. Something for which he waited did not happen, and at last, with a tightening of his lips and a gathering sternness in his eyes, he placed five sovereigns on the red, the number previously called being 13.

Black won.

For the next three attempts, each time with a £5 stake on the board, Mensmore backed the red, but still the black won.

Next to him an Italian, betting in notes of a thousand francs each, had quadrupled his first bet by backing the black.

Both men rose simultaneously, the Italian grinning delightedly at a smart Parisienne, who joyously nodded her congratulations, the Englishman quiet, utterly unmoved, but slightly pallid.

He passed out into the foyer and stopped to light a cigarette. Brett noticed that his hand was steady, and that all the air of excitement had gone.

These were ill signs. There is no man so calm as he who has deliberately resolved to take his own life. That Mensmore was ruined, that he was hopelessly in love with a woman whom he could not marry, and that he was about to commit suicide Brett was as certain as though the facts had been proved before a coroner.

But this thing should not happen if he, Brett, could prevent it.

In the gardens the band was now playing one of Waldteufel's waltzes Mensmore listened to the fascinating melody for a moment before he strolled off to the left of the Casino.

He hesitated at the door of the writing-room, but he went on puffing furiously at his cigarette. A guard looked at him as he turned again to the left, and made for the shaded terraces overlooking the sea.

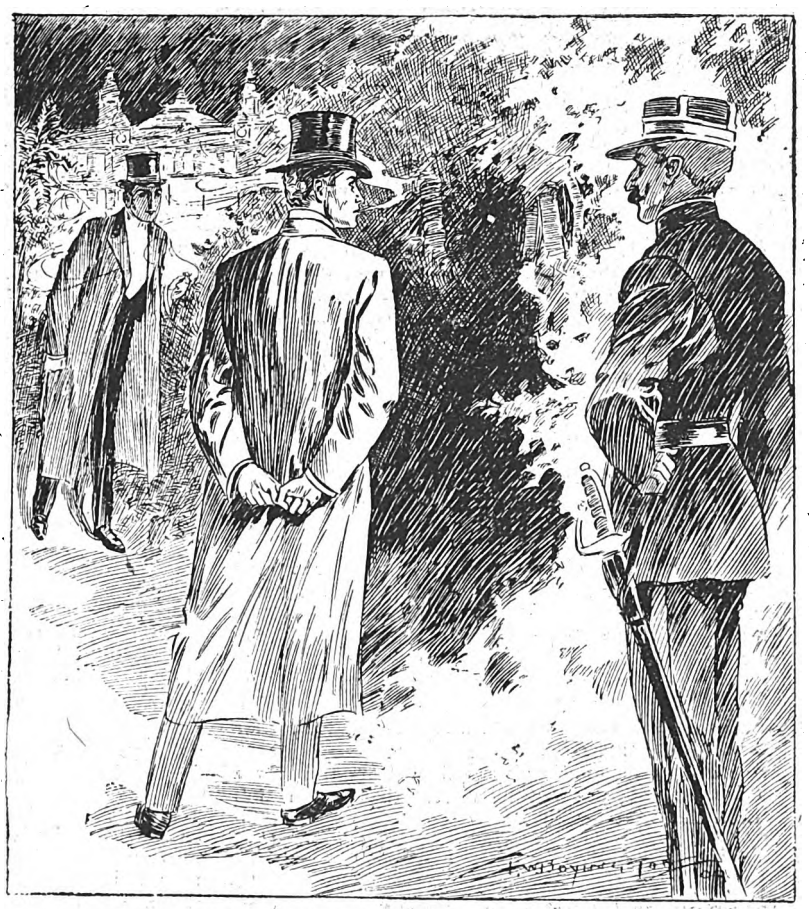
"A silent Englishman," thought the man; and he caught sight of Brett, also smoking, pre-occupied, and solitary.

"Another silent Englishman. *Mon dieu!* What miserable lives these English lead!"

And so the two vanished into the blackness of the foliage, while the frou-frou of silk on the promenade mingled with the soft laughter of the women, the modulated voices of the men, and the sweet strains of the music.

If it be true that extremes meet, then this was a night for a tragedy.

(To be continued.)



"Another silen Englishman. *Mon dieu!* What miserable lives the English lead!"

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SHORT STORIES ABOUT XMAS FESTIVITIES.

We devote, every week, two pages of *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "The Keepers of the People," by Edgar Jepson, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case the source *must* be stated. The prize of One Guinea offered for the best Storyette in this competition has been won this week by Mr. C. G. F. Chute, of 3 Belleville Avenue, Rathgar Road, Dublin. Attempts this week must deal with Stories about ANY SUBJECT, and must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, January 7th. Post-cards only, please.

Poor Old Chap!

UNCLE BARKER asked us all to dinner last Christmas, hinting at the same time that we should have a little surprise. We had!

As the principal dish was brought in, he said:

"Now, my dears, here is the biggest turkey on record, raised on my own bit of farm, too."

It certainly was an enormous bird, and for a long time it sturdily resisted the persuasions of the carving knife.

At length, just as our respected relative paused for breath, a deep and agonised voice broke from its mangled bosom.

"Oh, Barker, Barker! How can you treat me like this? Don't you remember how we used to play together when we were young?"

We gazed at one another in consternation, and it was several minutes before we remembered that cousin Bob was a bit of a ventriloquist.

C. G. F. C.

The Splodgers' Christmas Guest.

"MARIE, my dear, I forgot to tell you, I'm going to bring home a member of the club on Christmas Eve," said Mr. Splodgers, a few nights since.

"Club!" exclaimed the horrified Mrs. S. "What club? Pray, how long have you belonged to this precious club of yours unknown to your wife?"

"About four months, my love," said Splodgers, mildly. "I think you'll like the young fellow. He's very quiet, but only wants drawing a bit."

"I hate your quiet fellows!" exclaimed Mrs. S., spitefully. "At Christmas time I like somebody who's jolly."

"Well, he may rise to the occasion, you know, but I hope he won't."

"That's just like you, Splodgers. So selfish! You two will stick yourselves over the fire, and it will be jaw, jaw, jaw, all day long."

"I won't say but what you may be right," said Splodgers, evasively. "However, he's coming; and as he's under an obligation——"

"Obligation! What obligation, Mr. Splodgers?"

"Well, my dear, I hardly like to tell you. The fact is, there's a little matter of a bill——"

"Oh, Splodgers! Splodgers!" wailed his good lady. "This comes of keeping secrets from your wife. I'm sure this friend of yours is no good."

"Ahem! He's rather a downy customer, I must admit."

"And how much does he owe you, for goodness' sake?"

"I hope to get at least fourteen pounds after he's dressed."

"Do you mean to say, Splodgers, that he's going to sleep here, when we haven't got a room in which we can stuff him?"

"The kitchen will do very well," said Splodgers, calmly.

"The kitchen!" exclaimed Mrs. S., gasping.

"Certainly, my love. Where else would you stuff a goose, and the very finest which ever came out of a club?" And Splodgers chuckled.

A. W.

The Roast Not Required.

A LADY one Christmas in a country district was once expecting some friends to their Christmas dinner, but as she had forgotten to order a roast of beef the day previous when she had been in town, she asked the postman if he would be so kind as to do so on his way through.

But what was her astonishment to hear the postman exclaiming, as he handed her a post-card:

"You needna' bother; they're not comin'."

J. E.

No Escaping it.

A POPULAR minister in Fifeshire, in the good old times, used at Christmas to be inundated with hampers filled with good things. On one occasion an enormous turkey was sent to him by the thoughtful kindness of a neighbouring farmer, but as the minister's family had provided for their Christmas dinner, the bird was sent to the market and sold.

A passer-by seeing this fine specimen of poultry, said:

"What a splendid turkey! Just the thing for the minister's Christmas dinner!"

So to the minister it was again sent.

The provident wife sent it again to the market and sold it again for a handsome sum.

Another friend, similarly struck with the splendid proportions of the turkey, purchased it and sent it to the minister. The good woman, not wishing to fly in the face of Providence, said at last.

"It's clear that Providence means us to have this turkey," and with the approbation of the family it formed part of the Christmas dinner.

D. P. R.

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His Own, After All!

IT was Christmas Eve, and Simpson sat in his easy-chair, in full enjoyment of bodily health and mental tranquility. He was a connoisseur of wines, with a predilection for port, and two years before had purchased a huge cask of his favourite beverage, which, for greater security, he had placed at the end of his cellar, and had built a wall right across, thus shutting it off completely from all prying eyes.

At length he rose, dressed, and entered the dwelling of his next-door neighbour, where he was invited to spend this Christmas Eve.

"Magnificent port, Mr. Smith," he said, as he emptied his glass. "May I inquire where such rare old stuff is procurable?"

"Well, Mr. Simpson," answered the host, "I'll let you into a secret, but you mustn't tell anyone! I was making some alterations in my cellar a few months ago, and came across a cask of port, which the previous tenant had walled up, and, stupid fool! left when he vacated the house. This is some of it, but, unfortunately, we are into the last bottle, else you would have had some with you."

And Mr. Simpson's mental tranquility was sadly disturbed; but he wisely said nothing.

W. I.

He Wanted his Xmas Box.

As Mr. Squires stood on the doorstep, a seedy-looking individual, wearing a ragged suit and a red nose, came up the garden path and addressed him thus:

"Merry Christmas, guv'nor."

"Same to you, my good man," said Mr. Squires. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, guv'nor, I've called fer me Christmas box."

"Hum! I don't seem to know you. Are you the dustman?"

"No, guv'nor, I'm the bloke who were playing the cornet last Christmas, an' yer told me to take my bloomin' hook."

"Oh! you played the cornet did you!" said Mr. Squires, in a threatening voice. "And why should I give you a Christmas box, eh?"

"Becos I ain't playing it this Christmas, guv'nor."

And Mr. Squires stumped up. J. W.

That Christmas Eve!

LAST Christmas Eve a friend of mine invited me home to spend Christmas with him among his domestic circle.

"Charming place," he said. "Quite in the country. You will thoroughly enjoy yourself."

On Christmas Eve the usual festivities were kept up in the city, and it was late when we left our convivial companions for our jaunt to the suburbs. By a singular coincidence the train landed us at the wrong station, and we had a long muddy midnight walk in country lanes.

At last we arrived at our destination, but were surprised to see that no midnight oil was burning.

On examining closer my friend espied a board at the gate, and with the aid of a match read thereon:

"This charming residence for sale."

Then my friend's fickle memory came back to him with full force.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed in despairing accents, "we moved to Richmond last week."

A. B.

A £10 Note for a Single Word.

THIS is the biggest price ever paid for literary matter. Kipling has received a shilling a word for his stories; other authors of high repute have at times received nearly as much.

But Ten Pounds for a single word—a word that is capable of being thought of by anybody—is absolutely a new record in big prices.

The word we want from you is simply

THE TITLE OF A NEW PAPER

we shall publish in the early spring.

The title of this paper must be expressed in one word. The shorter, the easier, and the more expressive, the better.

It is necessary, of course, in order that you may choose the best title, for you to know something about the proposed paper.

In the first place, it will be a

FIRST-CLASS HUMOROUS PAPER.

It will be filled each week with the work of the very best humorous artists in the United Kingdom, and will, in consequence, be a week's compendium of hearty, wholesome and unrestrained laughter.

The Editor of the BIG BUDGET is going to be responsible for the new paper, and he will offer a few more remarks for your guidance concerning it in the Century Number of the BIG BUDGET, ready on January 3rd.

Before trying for that £10 note, therefore, it would be advisable for you to purchase this great Century Number of the "B.B." As, however, the number printed is limited, and there will be a big demand for it, you should order a copy at once.

OBTAINABLE AT ALL NEWSAGENTS, SHOPS, AND BOOKSTALLS.

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The Curate of Crimpington Skateport.

CRIMPINGTON SKATEPORT is a seaside village in the far west of England. It is situated on the north coast where the long Atlantic rollers break magnificently on stretches of gleaming sand, with a roar like distant artillery.

There is a resemblance between Skateport and a famous piece of poetical furniture, which was

Contrived a double debt to pay,
A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day.

For three parts of the year Skateport was a highly-favoured fishing village. For the fourth quarter it was a locally fashionable watering-place in good odour. It had a funny little stone pier, which commenced running out to sea with such stolidity, and solidity, you thought it was going right across to America, but got alarmed after about eighty yards or so, turned abruptly to the right, and presently broke off short.

The houses gathered in close round the sweep of the bay like children going to near the water's edge as they dare. The children, however, have the advantage of being able to run away if the wave breaks further than usual. The houses could not run, and consequently, especially in the winter, were often up to their knees in water.

The church, fortunately, was placed on somewhat higher ground, possibly because its tower was used as a lighthouse to guide the small fishing-fleet to port, and so escaped these inundations, which would have done it considerable damage, for it was old and very dilapidated.

The fact was the vicar had been very neglectful. It was rumoured that, like his church, he wanted a tile or so. At any rate, his bishop had suspended him for his irregularities, and no wonder; for when his lordship came over to inquire into the state of the parish he found the vicar had got out of the way and left one of the churchwardens to do the honours.

From him the bishop learnt, on asking why the bells had been removed, that the vicar had taken them down at the request of the parishioners, who complained that they made such a noise of a Sunday morning that they could not sleep. Finding that there was no Sunday School, the bishop demanded why it was closed, and was informed that the farmers had objected to it for fear the poor folk's children should get to know as much as they did.

Further questioning elicited the fact that there was but one service on Sundays, and that sermons were not the rule, but the exception, because the vicar thought one good sermon now and then was better than a lot of bad ones running. Despite the consolatory explanation of the churchwarden that when there was no sermon the more respectable members of the congregation went and had a pint and a pipe at "The Ship," the bishop was so horrified that he suspended the vicar, and hence it was that my hero became the curate of Crimpington Skateport.

Their appearance was greeted with tittering and shy glances.

The Rev. Singleton Symes, curate of Crimpington Skateport, was a mild and amiable being, not too young to be marriageable, and not too old to be susceptible of the charms of the fair sex. In fact, he might still fairly be classed among the young men who are eligible as guests at humble "Kettledrums," if one may apply the fashionable term to very unpretentious social gatherings, where the oleaginous excellence of the crumpet vies with the crisp piquancy of the sally-lunn.

To be sure, the worthy Singleton had

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but a brief season of the wild excitement adumbrated in my last paragraph. Muffins and bohea came but as oases in the sahara of his existence. It was only during the watering-place season that he carried the tea-cake round in giddy circles, or crushed cup after cup of stimulating souchong. For the other nine months he sipped his solitary sloe and nibbled his lonely toast in his own abode.

He felt the change. He missed female society. He sighed for a heart that would share his humble home, and sew on his schismatic buttons, for it was one of his peculiarities—due, perhaps, to the vigour wherewith his landlady-laundress wielded her iron—that he constantly shed those small mother-of-pearl discs as though they were intended to punctuate the affairs of life. He had never recovered the graces of his delivery from the time when, in the midst of a passionate burst of eloquence, he had cast one of the buttons of his shirt front, and it fell on the bald head of the dozing clerk, who woke up with a loud and distinctive "Amen" that brought Singleton's sermon to a premature close.

It will not, therefore, surprise my readers to learn that Singleton Symes, B.A., was on the look out for a wife. The only difficulty was that, in consequence of the tenuity of his salary, it was necessary that he should find one with a little money; and, strange to say, heiresses, and especially heiresses who would be likely to bestow their hands on middle-aged curates of not too prepossessing loveliness, were not as plentiful as periwinkles at Crimpington Skateport, even in the height of the fashionable season.

The hour came at last—and the woman. Our Singleton's waiting was rewarded, and he learnt that there was a deep truth in the assertion of his favourite poet, that

> No one is so accursed of fate,
> No one so utterly desolate;
> But some heart, though unknown,
> Responds unto his own.

Miss Everilda Matilda Docwra came down on a visit to some friends staying at Skateport. Now Everilda was the heiress of the late Ebenezer Docwra, who had been an eminent drysalter. She was, it must be admitted, not as young as she had been, but who of us is, my brothers and sisters? At any rate, she was not too old for Singleton, and, better still, she apparently did not think he was too old for her, though their courtship was commenced by her coming to him to seek the advantage of "his larger experience and superior knowledge to a poor, ignorant girl" on some not very important theological question.

Everilda was very romantic. She quoted—and even allowed it to be whispered that she wrote—a good deal of poetry. Indeed, she blushingly admitted that some lines in her album, which were greatly admired by Singleton, were a humble effort of hers. The effort must have taxed her memory rather than her invention, for the poem began with

> The sea, the sea, the bounding sea,
> The green, the grand, the fine, the free.

Her poetical instincts and her sentiment were unfortunately backed up by an acquaintance with nature and natural phenomena, her deficiency in this respect being probably due to her long residence in Camomile Street, where the paternal business had been carried on. Under those circumstances we may fairly forgive her for asking in the autumn, of one of the fishermen's wives, "if there were any nightingales in the neighbourhood."

It so happens that the bird is unknown in the extreme

So the swain sat with his legs dangling over the cliff, and tootled away plaintively.

west, so the woman did not understand the question. Everlida explained that she meant a kind of bird that sings during the night, whereupon she was told they swarmed up in the ivy at the abbey ruins on the cliff, and made such a noise at night that the people close by couldn't sleep for them sometimes. The woman added, however, that these birds were known in that neighbourhood by the name of "ooles" (owls).

But if this had been the only mistake into which Everilda fell on account of her cockney rearing it would not have been of much consequence. It was nearly leading her into a serious danger. To avoid the tittering and sly glances with which the youthful and heedless among the visitors to Skateport were wont to greet the appearance of Everilda and Singleton on the parade and sands in front of the village, the lovers were in the habit of meeting at a point some distance along the coast westward, whither Everilda would go along the sands, while Singleton took the longer and more tiring route by the cliff, in order not to attract attention to their rendezvous.

Between the village and their trysting-place there was a little bay, the headlands inclosing which ran out so far that the rising tide, soon after its turn, imprisoned any incautious wanderer between the two capes. Luckily there was a sort of rocky islet in the centre of the bay, between the headlands, which was never covered except in very rough weather and at very high tides. In this trap poor Everlida was caught one evening.

She had been late in starting for the rendezvous, and it being a fine, calm evening, had loitered somewhat on the road, so that when she reached the western-point she

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found herself cut off by the tide, and on looking back found her retreat stopped in a similar way at the other extremity of the bay.

Her alarm at first was immense. In fact it was not allayed until Singleton, growing anxious at her failing to keep tryst, and supposing she had been prevented from coming by the rise of the tide, passed by on his disconsolate road home along the cliff, and discovered her plight.

He was able to assure her there was no danger, though not without difficulty, and many relapses into want of faith on her part. He directed her to the little rocky islet, and then proposed going to Skateport and taking a boat to fetch her off. But to this she objected with tears and shrieks.

"Singleton, do not leave me! I should die if I were all alone by myself!"

He explained to her the length of time she would have to wait until the tide released her; but she declared that if he stayed near her the length of her imprisonment was nothing, but that she would expire of fright if left alone for five minutes.

"And if," she added fondly, "the tide should rise and carry me off, you will leap from the cliff and let us perish together, won't you?"

Singleton promised, but he said it was Saturday evening, and he did not see how service could be performed next day, supposing he did jump. He knew by experience the difficulty of getting a substitute in this remote part of the county. And he knew, too, what odd things arose from such substitution, for the last time he had occasion to be absent from Skateport on a Sunday, he had at the last moment prevailed on an old college friend, curate in an agricultural parish a few miles off, and that gentleman had preached a sermon, in which he described the congregation as a nest of sheepstealers, robbers, liars, and ruffians, to the intense surprise and indignation of the worthy Skateporters, until he, seeing the effect of his discourse, told them parenthetically that they must not take any notice of the sermon, which he had written for his own parish, and brought away by mistake instead of another.

The whole thing was explained in a minute.

But to return to our lovers. In as tender a strain as it was possible to maintain an affectionate conversation at the same pitch as you would hail a boat, Singleton cheered his Everilda, and she besought him not to leave her.

The evening shades gathered fast, and the increasing gloom was rapidly snatching Singleton from the anxious gaze of his love, when he fortunately remembered that he had his flute in his pocket. He at once drew it forth, and discoursed upon it such soothing airs as he could achieve without the notes to guide him. So the swain sat with his legs dangling over the cliff, and tootled away plaintively through the weary hours of darkness, while his beloved, reclining on the rock, reposed as comfortably as was compatible with the presence of multitudes of sharp-pointed limpets on her stony couch.

The tide receded at last, and at last the grey of morning creeping up the sky gave sufficient light to guide Everilda's homeward steps. Singleton, feeling somewhat hungry and flatulent after his sixtieth repetition of "The Last Rose of Summer," varied as it had been by the uncertainty about the correct notes, put his flute in his pocket, and turned his face towards Crimpington. During all the long hours of their vigil nobody—not even a coastguard—had come near them.

Of course Everilda's friends had been much alarmed about her absence and were glad to see her back in safety.

That day Everilda consented to reward her Singleton's constancy, and agreed to become his wife in a fortnight's time. Singleton could hardly read the service for agitation, and as for his sermon he made so many blunders in reading it that he enunciated about a dozen heresies without knowing it.

How bright the future looked now. The last button he was ever to shed dropped from its hold unnoticed as he strained his Everilda to his palpitating shirt-front in the first embrace permitted him as her future husband.

He found that button in his Wellington boot that night, and placed it on the mantel-piece with an air of reverence, as if it were the last offering to Venus Coelibum, or whatever deity it is that harasses single men.

Alas, the proverbial slip between cup and lip! The invariable disturbance of the course of true love could not be spared the curate of Crimpington Skateport.

On the very morning after his heart had been gladdened by the whispered consent of his blushing, if not beauteous Everilda, as he was sitting at breakfast wrapped in dreams of bliss, there came a knock at his door, which was immediately opened without waiting for a summons by a ragged and disreputable-looking figure, which brought in with it an odour of spirits and stale tobacco-smoke, as if it were the incarnation of the parlour of the pothouse.

Singleton's face fell, and so bitter was the grief and humiliation it expressed that we will, if you please, let the curtain fall, too, and begin another chapter.

Everilda was sitting on the parapet of the pier, indulging in roseate visions, when she beheld her Singleton approaching in the distance. With the

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pretty playfulness of girlhood, she hid behind the stock of an anchor. He had not seen her, and she would surprise him.

Instead of that, however, he surprised her. As he was passing the Dolphin, one of the lowest and most disreputable beershops in the village, he suddenly paused, and after looking cautiously round to see if he was observed, disappeared through the door whence proceeded loud sounds of boisterous and drunken revelry.

At first Everilda wondered, but upon reflection she began to conjecture that he had entered the house to rebuke the fishermen for their dissipation, in his character as clergyman of the place. She waited for him to come out, but he did not emerge immediately. The noise, which had somewhat abated on his entrance, soon broke out with increased loudness. At last, to her horror and shame, Everilda saw his familiar figure come staggering out at the door. He clutched at the post to steady himself, then took two steps, broke into a sort of shambling run, and fell down on his face.

Everilda fled down a by-street to conceal her humiliation and anger. She was so overcome that she could not venture back to her friends for some time. When she did she found paterfamilias looking very grave. He requested a few words with her in private, and on her acceding to his request told her it was his painful duty to inform her that, a short time before her return, the Rev. Singleton Symes had been carried past the house by some fishermen, shouting, swearing, and singing, and evidently in a dreadful state of intoxication. Miss Docwra at once related what she had seen, and on the completion of her recital was seized with a violent fit of hysterics. For the rest of the day she did not leave her room.

Next morning as she was preparing to go out to do some shopping in a small way, the door opened, and in walked the Rev. Singleton Symes, looking as fresh and clean as a new pin. The hypocrisy was too flagrant. Everilda rushed past him with averted face, and before he could recollect his sentence, paterfamilias had rushed in, and, as it were, blown him off the premises amid a whirlwind of abuse and indignation.

Singleton went home disconsolate and wrote to Everilda to ask for an explanation. His note was returned unopened. He wrote to paterfamilias, and again received back his communication, this time with a verbal message to the effect that if he did not leave off the annoyance, he should be reported to his bishop, and unfrocked! Then he broke down completely. For the next two or three days he was utterly prostrate, and did not stir out of doors.

There were not in all Crimpington and within twenty miles round it two more miserable people than Everilda Docwra and Singleton Symes.

To make matters worse Skateport began to talk, and when Skateport did begin to talk it always gave evidence of its possession of a powerful imagination for which no one would ever have given it the slightest credit. Some oozings of the truth as to the vigil of the lovers, and of Singleton's drunken fit, having trickled through the village, the most extraordinary stories were told. Singleton had decoyed Everilda to the beach and tried to run away with her to America in an open boat. He had harnessed a horse to her bathing-machine and attempted an elopement. He had offered, and been refused, and had therefore taken to drinking.

This last story gathered force in a strange way, for respectable inhabitants, who were superior to a taste for scandal, shook their heads at it and reluctantly said they had seen the curate reeling about the town after dark, though he certainly maintained an appearance of sobriety during the day.

Of course, nobody said a word to Singleton about this; but he found himself strangely avoided, and the next Sunday could not but notice a falling-off in the attendance at church. He went home, and, laying his head on his arms beside his untasted dinner, fairly wept.

"My fate! my cruel fate! Am I to be driven from this dear spot, too? Must I leave the place where my heart is planted?" sighed the curate.

That afternoon, as Everilda was stealing a mouthful of fresh air on the least-frequented portion of the beach, she saw Singleton approaching. There was no shelter at hand, no means of avoiding him. She must do that which is so painful to every well-regulated mind, even when it is absolutely necessary—she must give him the cut direct. He looked at her pleadingly, imploringly, but her eyes were stoney, and fixed. He shed a tear and a wrist-button—in vain!

She had barely passed him six steps when behold, from behind a boat lying beached close by, arose another Singleton Symes—a blear-eyed, red-nosed, dirty and unkempt double of the curate.

She screamed. Singleton rushed back, spoke a few hasty and angry words in his wrath, and then—well then all was over. The whole thing was explained in a minute. The double was his disreputable, drunken brother, who was always hunting the poor curate down, however often he changed his parish. He came ragged and penniless, and simple Singleton had given him his second best suit of clothes and all the money he could spare.

The scapegrace then promised to quit the place, but Singleton, as he passed the Dolphin, had recognised his voice, and had gone in and insisted on his leaving. Had Everilda fled less precipitately she would have seen the curate come out, after having stayed a minute to caution the landlord of the Dolphin about the irregularities he allowed in his house.

But the reprobate knew better than to leave his brother's neighbourhood. He hung about it still, only appearing at dusk, and his sudden appearance from behind the boat, where he had been basking in the sun, meant another raid upon Singleton's slender purse.

It was all cleared up now, and in another week Singleton and his Everilda were married. And the first use she made of her position as a wife was to give her disreputable brother-in-law a free passage to Australia, with a bonus of fifty pounds, deposited with the captain, and not to be given to him till after the ship had sailed.

That was the last of him—and this is the last of our curate of Crimpington Skateport. That cure is now in the charge of the Rev. Diogenes Bilberry, of St. Bridget's College, Cambridge. But elsewhere in the "Clergy List," to which I am indebted for the last bit of information, you will find that the Rev. Singleton Symes, M.A., is vicar of Pippinston-cum-Cheeseby, value £700.

And if you read the most interesting portion of THE TIMES, you will no doubt have noticed announcements to the effect that the wife of the vicar of Pippinston-cum-Cheeseby has presented a son and heir to the ex-curate of Crimpington Skateport.

HERBERT ANGELL.

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JOHN MURGATROYD'S AWAKENING.

At the news that John Murgatroyd had married, all the world wondered—that is, all John Murgatroyd's world — the world of finance, of the Stock Exchange. And when it was discovered that Mrs. Murgatroyd had been an actress, and was, moreover, twenty years younger than her husband, who was forty-five, the world wondered still more.

For John Murgatroyd was such a practical man, and the pretty butterfly which had fluttered from its most impractical calling into the stockbroker's life, could be of no assistance to him therein, that is to say, from John Murgatroyd's own point of view.

Those who had seen Mrs. Murgatroyd described her as a golden-haired, blue-eyed, fascinating little fairy, with all the vivacity of her calling, and with a taste for dainty confections in the way of dress. That was immediately after her marriage. Others who saw her later spoke of her with less enthusiasm.

She was certainly golden-haired, they said, but instead of that hair hanging in clustering ringlets about her forehead it was unbecomingly dressed and brushed straight back from her face. Her eyes were blue, but they lacked warmth and animation, while her manner was subdued and without charm.

To John Murgatroyd was due the metamorphosis. Though a fit of midsummer madness—one of those lapses which even the most practical men get at times—had caused him to make the pretty actress his wife, in the stockbroker's utilitarian career the beautiful held no place.

He had never yet awakened to its necessity. Creatures only made to flutter in the sunshine, to gladden the eye and refresh the senses, were mere drones in the world's hives. John would have none of them. So ere the honeymoon was well over, he proceeded to change his butterfly into a bee, forgetting always that the bee might have a sting.

Elaine—that was Mrs. Murgatroyd's name—rebelled for a time, then gradually the petrifying process of the stockbroker's system seemed to have its effect. One by one the little arts which she had adopted to make the home beautiful were discontinued, and instead of sitting down to the piano of an evening and endeavouring by song and music to soothe him into forgetfulness of the friction between the nations, the wars and the rumours of wars, and such kindred matters which swing the pendulum of the speculator's hopes and fears, she seemed content to spend the time over his books, puzzling her poor little head with figures and similar duties, which well might have been left to others.

Strange to say, when the metamorphosis was complete, and Elaine had become as undemonstrative and apparently as practical as himself, John was not altogether as pleased with his handiwork as he had anticipated. He would not have admitted the fact for the world. That he had so effectually moulded her nature to his own was pleasing to his vanity, but deep down in his heart there was a feeling of dissatisfaction, why or with whom he was not yet sure.

Clearer ideas upon the subject came to him in time, and for them the trouble in the Far East was accountable. Certain Chinese railway stocks in which he was largely interested suddenly went down with a run. When the International forces had crushed the Boxers and reduced the country once more to order, John thought they would right themselves. In the meantime he had determined to hold on.

As a consequence, for some time money would be very "tight" with him, so "tight" indeed that it would need every penny he could scrape together to tide him over the present crisis.

One evening on his arrival home he mentioned the matter to Elaine.

"So you see we must cut down expenses in every possible way," he concluded, "and as you have plenty of leisure during the day don't you think we could dispense with one of the servants?"

Mrs. Murgatroyd gave rather a bitter smile. For a long time past she had been practically doing work which would have kept a secretary fairly well employed. Still, she did not remind him of the fact, but replied calmly:

"By dismissing a servant the actual saving would be slight, and although I am quite willing to take on the extra work, I think I can suggest a better course."

"What is it?" he asked dubiously. There was something in his wife's manner which made him uneasy.

"Oh, it is perfectly practical," with the slightest suspicion of a sneer in her tones. "This morning I received a letter from Florence Cabourne. You remember her; she was the leading lady who succeeded me in the company in which I was playing when we first met."

Mr. Murgatroyd nodded.

"Well, she has been in the company ever since, but

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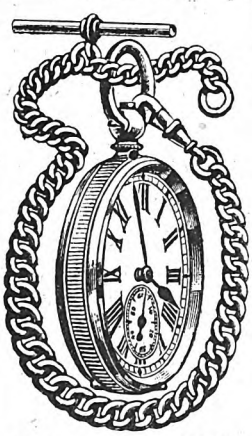

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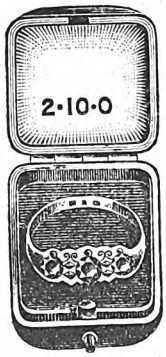

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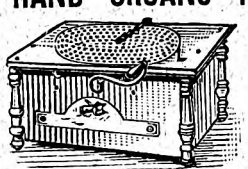

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now writes to say she is relinquishing the engagement, which is rather a good one, as you know. What do you say to my applying for it?"

The stockbroker's face fell. The idea of his wife returning to the profession, with all the temptations connected therewith, filled him with dismay. Still, as a practical man, with a reputation as such to keep up, he could not give voice to it. The salary she had received had been a considerable one, and Elaine was quite as capable of looking after herself now as before, so after a pause, in which unknown to himself she had been watching him closely, he said:

"Although, as you know, I strongly disapprove of your late profession, yet, as the money would be extremely useful just now, it would be absurd to let any personal prejudice stand in the way."

Her eyes flashed.

"Then I may offer myself for the engagement?"

"You may," he said.

The application for the coming vacancy proved successful. "Miss Elaine Trelawny," as she would appear on the bills and programmes, had been a very clever actress, and her old manager was only too pleased to have her back. So it came about that shortly John Murgatroyd resumed his bachelor existence.

The stockbroker never paid money without taking care that he received value in full, consequently his personal comfort was as well looked after and the household duties as well performed as before his wife went away, yet he missed her at every turn.

The house, too, of whose solid, unadorned comfort he had been rather proud, seemed suddenly to have acquired both emptiness and ugliness. So one day, when stocks had taken a favourable turn, he astonished his servants by the introduction of a cartload of artistic furniture, while the piano, which was of ancient make and doubtful tone, was exchanged for a dainty instrument befitting a lady's boudoir.

Even there he did not stop. Other changes equally startling followed. A conservatory was built out from the drawing-room. The monotonous stretch of greensward in front of the house was cut up into flower-beds, and rare and beautiful flowers set therein.

Why he did all this was as inexplicable to John himself as to others. The old lamps were growing dim, but his eyes were not yet accustomed to the brighter radiance of the new. Only vaguely he was beginning to realise that life might hold other interests, other pleasures than in watching the rise and fall of the money market. In the interim, mechanically almost but with a growing pleasure in the doing, he went on beautifying his home. When he had finished he wrote for Elaine to return. Two days later her answer came.

"You ask me to come back to you," she wrote. "Being a practical man, you will forgive me if I decline. When I married you I was young and romantic, and in spite of my calling, which does not, perhaps, foster domestic virtues, with high ideals as to a wife's duties. I am still young, but the romance is dead, killed like my ideals, by you. Before we had been married a month, to my sorrow I discovered it was not a wife you wanted, but an amanuensis. Perhaps in time I might have accepted my fate at least with resignation had you been satisfied with this, but you were not.

"I had a liking for all that was bright and beautiful in life. That was in your eyes a sin, one to be remorselessly purged away. Existence for me must be made as sordid as your own, and yours is very sordid, John. I was, as I have said, romantic; so much so that for a time it even covered your faults with a cloak of love. You taught me that this was folly, that in real life there was no romance. To be brief, you made me as matter-of-fact as yourself.

"Now mark the result. In this company there is a gentleman—a young fellow—much about the same age as myself, good-looking, clever, with tastes similar to my own, and one who, moreover, loves me to distraction. He has been offered an extremely remunerative engagement abroad, which offer will be made a joint one if he has a wife. He has asked me to accompany him, to enable him in fact to say, 'Give me a joint engagement.' After the training I have received from you, to look at all things from a purely practical point of view, can you blame me if I have said 'Yes?' You cannot."

That was all she said. There was no word of regret, no farewell.

John Murgatroyd dropped the letter to the ground with a groan, and as the sheet of perfumed paper fluttered earthwards the scales fell from his eyes. He had changed his butterfly into a bee—for what? Only that it might turn and sting him; and, worse than all, it was the butterfly which he had loved. The letter had reached him by the morning's post. Evening came and found him still shut up with it in his study.

For the first time for twenty-five years, Sundays and holidays excepted, he had not visited his office. Messages, telegraphic and verbal, had come to him requiring immediate attention, but like one in a dream he had sat hour after hour thinking, reflecting, regretting. Towards night out of the chaos of his mind a resolve shaped itself. He would go to the town where she was and try to persuade her to alter her determination.

The decision, once formed, he proceeded with feverish haste to put it into excution, and cramming a few things into a bag, he hurried out of the house. He was crossing the lawn when in the uncertain light he came in contact with someone coming from the opposite direction, someone who uttered a little shriek of alarm, and the next moment was folded in his arms.

"Elaine! Elaine! Is it you?" he cried.

The little figure, which he was clasping tightly to his breast, made no effort to extricate itself.

"You would not think of acting like this to anyone else, I should think, John. But," noticing his bag, "where were you going?"

"I was going to you."

"Why?"

"Need you ask? I was going to beg of you to forgive me—to come home. But you," uneasily, "why have you come, after——"

"After what I said in my letter?" A smile played about her lips. "It's a woman's privilege to change her mind, John."

"Then you have changed it?" he cried eagerly.

"Not so fast, John. I'm not sure that you will wish me to stop when you know all."

"What do you mean?" keen anxiety in his tones.

"I mean that I've deceived you all along. I pretended that I had lost all my romance, all my ideals, and become practical and horrid generally. But you've not altered me a bit, John, and when I pretended you had it was just a ruse, like my letter, to alter you, for you need it sadly. Now, do you want me to stay?"

"More than ever, my darling," he cried passionately. "I never knew how dull and dreary my life was till you showed me what it might have been."

"What it will be, John," she corrected softly.

HUBERT BARTLETT.

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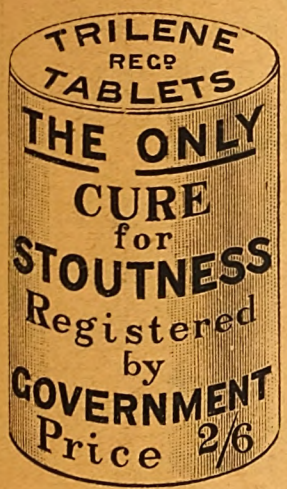

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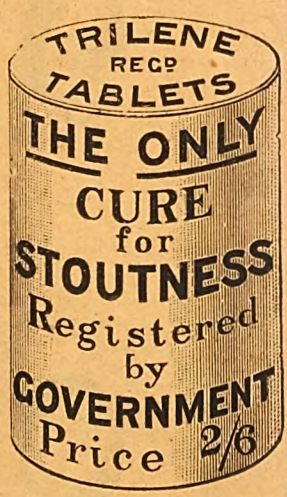

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.
Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely. You have our united thanks, and if I can do anything to promote your interests I will freely use my utmost endeavours to do so.
"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

Mrs. DARNLEY SMITH, Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, writes: "Trilene Tablets have reduced my weight very much. I am so much lighter in every way, and better in health."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st. and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

"77 Hindhill Street, Heywood, February 5th, 1898.
"Gentlemen,—I have not quite finished the box of Tablets and am 2lb. lighter. The change is great, and several friends are beginning the treatment, which not only reduces fat but strengthens rheumatic joints—such has been the case with me. "Yours sincerely, M. A. HEYWOOD."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholme Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."
West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

Mrs. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44, Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

A. M. PRATT of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced t is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mr. WALKER, 236 London Road, Hazelgrove, Stockport, says: "I have used one box and am 14lb. lighter. Send another soon as possible."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs, says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs E. ALEXANDER, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They have reduced me quite 2 stone, and I am now quite cured."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Mrs. TAYLOR-ROBINSON, of Tweed Green House, Whalley Range, Manchester, says: "I feel so much lighter and better since taking your Tablets, and am so much thinner that I hardly recognise myself."

Miss A. LONG, of 9 South Parade, Waterford, writes: "Your Tablets have reduced me 14lb."

Miss A. DAWSON, 62 Orchard Street, Weston-super-Mare, says: "Glad to say the Tablets have sufficiently reduced me. I shall always recommend them."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

Mrs. DREW, of 1 Bellevue Gardens, The Nursery, Devizes, writes: "I took Tablets some years ago; they soon reduced me and I have not got stout since. Send me a box for my mother."

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1 DOSE affords relief, and one friend tells another, that Beecham's Pills are really "Worth a Guinea a Box."

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SHORT STORIES

A WEEKLY MAGAZINE FOR HOME AND TRAIN

No. 628. FOR WEEK ENDING JANUARY 12TH, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

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BILIOUS & NERVOUS DISORDERS,
Sick Headache, Constipation, Wind and Pains in Stomach, Impaired Digestion, Disordered Liver, and Female Ailments.

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 628.] For the Week Ending January 12th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

UNDER ORDERS

IN a shabby ground-floor room, which contrived to do duty as study, dining-room, nursery, and general sitting-room of a Vicarage in the East End of London, sat, one afternoon in late autumn, a mother and son. That most pathetic form of poverty—the kind which is linked in indissoluble union with gentility—had stamped this nondescript apartment for its own.

The wall paper had seen better days, and had lighted on exceptionally dingy ones; the ceiling was blackened with gas; the carpet had lost all trace of its original pattern; the drugget was copiously darned in places, where a threadbare condition recorded the track of footsteps; the horsehair seats of the mahogany chairs were deplorably worn at the edges, and the position of a railway rug in the very centre of a forbidding-looking sofa suggested the idea that rents or stains probably lurked beneath its friendly shade.

Little folks had left marks of their presence scattered here and there in the room. On the sideboard was a pile of copy-books, dog's-eared primers, and story books, flanked by an atlas; from behind a sofa bolster peeped a scantily-attired doll, with solemn, staring, blue eyes, hectic cheeks, and a battered head, whereon bald patches alternated with flaxen ringlets.

The house stood in a plot of unproductive land—by courtesy called a garden—which apparently furnished a recreation ground for a number of hens, which at the present moment derived a strange enjoyment from occupying holes, which they had scratched for themselves, in the earth beneath some decrepit shrubs. Beyond the garden stretched the streets and lanes of Whitechapel. Ceaseless street cries, mingled with the rattle of wheels, and the jingle of tram-car bells. "Third Edition—ECHO," shouted, in shrill treble, a sharp-looking youngster, with a bundle of papers under his arm; "Six for sixpence—Cau-li-flowers," roared the deep bass of a costermonger; a dustman, a knife-grinder, a shoeblack, a cat's-meat man, a fish-stall keeper, and other members of the itinerant fraternity blended their voices in maddening chorus.

Within the Vicarage, mother and son, heedless of the distracting sounds, were engaged in earnest conversation. The mother, a middle-aged lady, with a careworn, refined face, diligently darned a small sock, which stood greatly in need of her services; the son, a young man of about three and twenty, with a slim, lithe figure, and a boyish, handsome, sensitive face, mechanically watched her flying needle as he listened or replied.

Mrs. Murray was wife of the vicar of St. Stephen's, Whitechapel, an elderly, scholarly, unsuccessful clergyman, whose means were wholly inadequate to meet all the claims made on him by a numerous family.

The son—David by name—had early developed intellectual tastes; his expenses at school and college had been defrayed by a wealthy, eccentric kinsman of his mother. The youth turned out shy, studious, and dreamy, the possessor of an enthusiasm for poetry, but of little practical ability, and of no instinctive knowledge of the world.

When with the attainment of the "Newdigate" and a good degree, his college career came to an end, and the time arrived when aid in the adoption of a calling would have been highly acceptable, the relation's assistance was capriciously withdrawn.

David Murray returned home, and doubt reigned under the paternal roof with regard to his prospects in life. His father shook his head dubiously when the young man bashfully professed himself a wooer of the muse, and expressed a desire to follow the vocation of a poet.

"Poetry doesn't pay, even when the writer is a genius, and—you are not a genius, you know, David," said the clergyman, with sorrowful candour.

Mrs. Murray belonged to a wealthy family who had taken umbrage at her marriage with a poor parson. Her brothers and sisters had consigned her to oblivion, and her name was omitted from her father's will. But a few days before my story opens, a sister, the widow of a fabulously rich East India merchant, named Wilton, held out the golden sceptre of reconciliation, and Mrs. Murray touched it with trembling rapture.

"We are sisters," graciously wrote Mrs. Wilton, from Florence, where she was spending some months, "and it is time to forget our differences."

From this exordium the widow passed to the narration

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of a family quarrel, which had indirect relation to the Murray interests.

"I am greatly disappointed," she wrote, "in my nephew Tom—poor James' son—who, till lately, managed my estates in Devon and Somerset. He has given me grave cause for displeasure, and I have shut my doors upon him. This being the case, I am anxious to make the acquaintance of your eldest lad, who has received no benefits from me, and from whom, therefore, according to the way of the world"—anger invested the writer's pen with unwonted sarcasm—"I expect the more gratitude. You have not yet, I suppose, seen your way to putting your son into any profession. Well, Tom's empty place, as steward, may in time and after due preparation suit him—who knows? I am resolved to like the lad; I even build castles in the air for him, and have in my head a scheme for his marriage with my husband's ward, Joyce Balfour, who lives with me and is my heiress. Send your son to Florence, to pass the winter here, and to return with us in the spring to Devonshire. Let him spend what time and see what places he likes *en route*. I inclose a cheque for his travelling expenses."

Consciousness of the pique (aroused by "nephew Tom") which obviously lay at the bottom of this letter, did not disturb the pleasure with which Mrs. Murray received her sister's overtures. She told herself, in her simple piety, that Providence had opened a way for the provision of her son; she called on David to rejoice with her.

But David refused to rejoice. On the afternoon when we find him in the Whitechapel parlour, his aunt's communication was under discussion, and his contribution to the conversation was flavoured with the spice of petulance. He was seated on a low chair, at his mother's feet, his elbows on his knees, his face in his hands, and his eyes fixed gloomily on the fire.

One clause in the letter—that relating to a possible marriage between Joyce Balfour and himself—had aroused his ire. The young man's ideal of marriage was high and pure; to have it rudely broken in upon with mercenary suggestions, and with the threatened interposition of a third person to regulate his choice, was to the last degree distasteful to him.

"Who is this Joyce Balfour, mother?" asked David, tossing aside the momentous letter.

"I know little more of her than your aunt tells us, dear; she was Mr. Wilton's ward, is rather younger than you, I fancy, and I have heard that she has considerable property. When she inherits my sister's estates, in addition to her own, she will be enormously rich. Your aunt"—with a slight pause and a wistful look in David's direction—"was always fond of match-making. If her fancy for an engagement between you two young people should be realised, your fortune would be made, David."

"You are not a genius, you know, David."

"But I don't want my fortune to be made—after that fashion," cried the young man hotly. "What do I know, and what do I care, about Miss Balfour?"

"She will be enormously rich," urged the mother, falling feebly back on her first point.

"I should be glad to know you were saved from a poor man's portion, David, for I have learnt by experience how hard it is to struggle against poverty."

The mother laid down her sock, and glanced appealingly towards the young man, who responded with a frown. David was young, and he had dreams of an affluent position, to be won, not by a mercenary marriage, but by literary achievements. But he could not brag of his spurs before he had won them; he grew silent.

"We have no right to assume, mother," he burst forth at length, his slumbering chivalry awakening to new life, "that Miss Balfour would accept the honour of an alliance with myself, even if I were inclined to offer it."

Mrs. Murray smiled. She took up her work again.

"Miss Balfour is probably aware," she said, as she stooped to re-thread her needle, "of your aunt's plans, and she must know that it might be greatly against her interests to oppose them."

There was another silence.

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"At least you will not decide in the matter till you have seen Miss Balfour, David?"

"No, I will not decide till I have seen her."

"And you will go to Florence?"

David rose, walked to the window and looked out. But he saw nothing; his thoughts were far away. Florence was a fascinating name to the untravelled lad; he wished that his errand there were not so unwelcome.

"Yes, I will go," he said slowly, "if I can reconcile myself to the thought that I am ousting my unknown cousin Tom from my aunt's favour."

"Nonsense."

The flying needle halted in mid-course.

"You are not ousting him; he has already ousted himself. Don't be quixotic, dear."

David sighed. His last hope of escape seemed dissipated.

Just at this moment the sound of fleet footsteps was heard; the door flew open, and three or four children, who had been passing—as marks of treacle on hands, faces, and pinafore testified—an agreeable half-hour in the kitchen, appeared on the scene.

Their advent was the signal for David's departure to his own room.

A few days later the young man started on his travels.

In the excitement inseparable from a first foreign tour, the object of his wanderings was almost forgotten. He went through the usual vicissitudes of a long journey. The usual important package was left behind, and its absence, as usual, discovered too late for recovery.

The usual countings of hand-bags and wraps were performed, and then the re-countings, to make assurance doubly sure. The usual sprightliness on boarding, and dejectedness on leaving, the packet, were duly experienced.

Then came hurried meals at railway stations, then views of monotonous French landscape, with its inevitable long straight rows of poplars, then glimpses of bolder scenery, of chalets, and of snow peaks, and then Switzerland burst upon David's view.

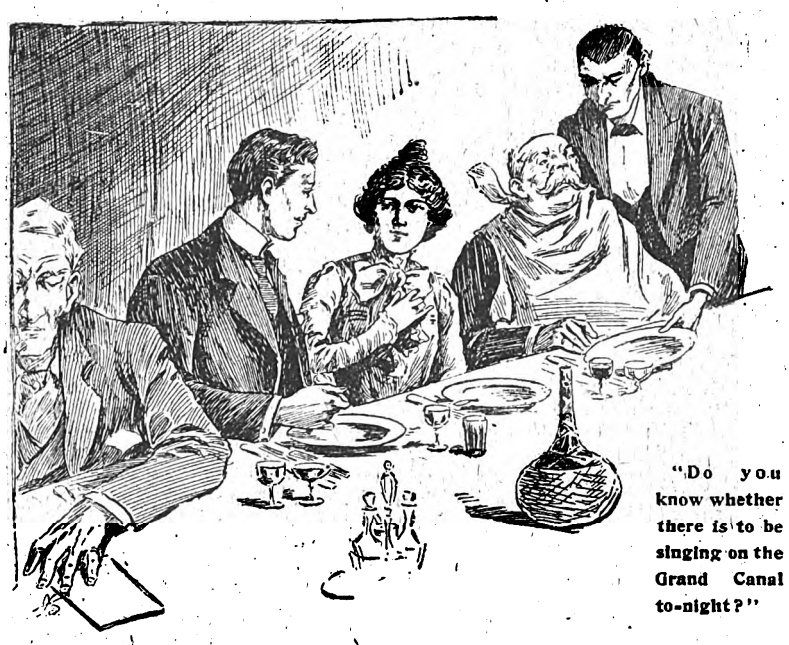
The young man had chosen the St. Gothard route; he had determined to avail himself of his aunt's generosity, and to linger over his journey; in a letter in which he announced his plans to her, he spoke of an intention to spend a couple of days at Lucerne, a few hours at Milan, and a week at Venice, the town which above all others appealed to his poetical fancy.

The lad revelled in his new experiences. His fellow tourists caught something of his enthusiasm; every day he made new friends, who parted from him at night with flattering reluctance.

Not only did the wonderful sights which met his eye delight David; in his young freshness he thoroughly enjoyed the importance of ordering beds and meals, or paying scores, at foreign inns. At last, Italy was reached; at last, Milan lay like a dream behind him, and one early morning found him sleeping fitfully in a railway carriage, and nearing Venice. At five o'clock he awoke, rubbed his eyes, opened the window and looked out.

The edge of a hand-bag, which had very poorly played the part of a pillow during the short night had left proof of its insufficiency in the cramped condition of David's neck. The young man was sleepy and cold; circumstances were not favourable to his first impression of the approach to Venice.

It was with some sense of dreariness that David found himself in a waste of water. Before him, behind him, and on either side, grey water stretched out, to meet a cold grey morning sky; no land was visible. He was on the bridge—nine miles long—which connects Venice with the mainland.



"Do you know whether there is to be singing on the Grand Canal to-night?"

In a short time the forms of towers and clustering houses began to reveal themselves against the horizon; the train whizzed on, and presently the city of the Adriatic lay, broad and clear, before David's eyes. The young man held his breath as he gazed. But a railway-station is the last place for sentimentalism, and before the platform of the Venetian railway-station the train came, in a few minutes, to a standstill.

"Romance hasn't a chance against its arch-enemy, steam," thought David, as he jumped to the ground, mustered a few words of stumbling Italian, embellished with French, and with their aid placed himself under the protection of a porter, a red-haired, well-built fellow, with a face like an old Venetian picture.

The Englishman's registered luggage was quickly collected and placed in a gondola; a herd of loafers—ragged, picturesque men and boys—swooped down upon him as fair prey; one seized his umbrella; another bore off his Murray and his macintosh; a third attempted—in spite of vigorous remonstrance—to relieve him of the light burden of a small paper volume of Howell's "Venetian Life," which he held in his hand. Before the station were a number of gondolas, their proprietors hailing passengers with deafening cries of "*Gondoli, signori. Signori, gondoli, gondoli.*"

"What hotel does the Signore command?" asked, hat in hand, David's gondolier, a weather-beaten old Venetian, with the manners of a duke.

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"The 'Angleterre,'" returned David with a series of nods; he guessed the meaning of the question.

Mrs. Wilton had furnished him with a list of hotels worthy his patronage in the different towns in which he was to stay.

Soon David was gliding on, along the Grand Canal, under the bridge of the Rialto, past the fruit market, with its wealth of grapes and pumpkins, beside world-famed Gothic or Renaissance palaces. He was in Venice at last—in Venice the city of dreams, and the whole scene had come upon him so suddenly that he failed to grasp the reality of his surroundings.

All that day—after his luggage had been deposited, and a bedroom secured at the "Angleterre," on the Riva degli Schiavoni—David spent in sight-seeing.

He wandered, half-dazed with the magnificence of its beauty, up and down St. Mark's, much pestered by assiduous guides, who, recognising his nationality, addressed him in a counterfeit of his own tongue; he visited the Doge's palace, rambled through the galleries, and crossed the Bridge of Sighs, into the Prisons; he lost himself in the intricate streets about the Merceria, and he strolled along the Piazza of St. Mark, listening to the afternoon band.

It was with a sense of a good day's work well done that he took his seat that evening at *table d'hôte*, stifled a hungry yawn, stretched his tired legs under the table and looked about him.

There was the usual Italian room, with its ugly wall-paper, its stove, and its painted ceiling; there was the long table, with its stiff central floral decoration; there was a glitter of gas; there was the sound of English predominating over every other tongue. The windows looked full on the Riva; a plaintive little face peeped in through the curtains, and a plaintive little voice solicited alms.

"Excuse me. Do you know whether there is to be singing on the Grand Canal, to-night?" said a voice in English in David's ear,

Something in the tone at once arrested and fascinated his attention. He looked quickly down to a face turned to his, and the blood mounted into his own face with a rush.

The propounder of the question was his nearest neighbour, a young girl, the owner of the most attractive face David had ever seen.

From beneath a mass of glorious red-brown hair looked a pair of the merriest, brightest blue eyes in all the world. The nose with its slight tendency to turn saucily upward, the dimpled chin, and the laughing mouth with its sweet red lips, made up a picture which dazzled and bewildered David.

"I—I—don't know," he stammered. "The ways of this place are strange to me; I only came into Venice this morning."

Then he bent over his soup, feeling strangely shy and embarrassed.

"Indeed. Do you intend to remain long?"

The girl's manner was, in its frank friendliness, a broad contrast to David's own. It was hardly, perhaps, the manner usually adopted by ladies in addressing a stranger of the other sex, but its fearless ease had in it nothing deserving the mysterious adjective "fast."

"About a week. I am going to Florence."

"To Florence!" The girl turned on David a rapid enquiring glance. "Why! I believe," she said, suddenly laying down her spoon and laughing an amused little laugh, "that I know who you are."

"Who I am?"

"Yes. How odd that I should have come upon you so soon. You are Mrs. Wilton's nephew, David Murray."

"Did you gain that piece of information from your fellow fairies?"

David had sufficiently overcome his shyness to venture on a tone of mild pleasantry, and some infinitesimal portion of the admiration which he felt found its way into his eyes.

"From no one more fairy-like than Mrs. Wilton herself. I am wintering in Florence with a friend, the lady opposite us."

David glanced across the table towards a pompous-looking dame, in a plum-coloured silk dress and a lace cap.

"And I know your aunt well. My friend and I are in Venice for a short holiday. Mrs. Wilton told us that you were coming to the 'Angleterre,' and I determined to look out for you. You wonder at my interest. Well, Mrs. Wilton told me, too"—in a tone of mock solemnity—"about Miss Balfour, and Miss Balfour and I happen to be great friends."

"What about Miss Balfour?" asked David, huskily.

Joyce had retired into the background of his memory; he was almost angry with this beautiful stranger for bringing her again into prominence. He had sent away his soup plate, half-empty, and he waved an impatient refusal to a waiter who approached with fish.

"Oh, you know," with a gay laugh. "You are going to Florence, in the character of a conquering hero, to carry off our heiress, Joyce Balfour."

The laugh nettled David. He coloured crimson.

"It pleases you," he said, crumbling his bread impatiently, and speaking under his breath, "to make merry at my expense. But you are wrong in your statement. I don't think myself a conquering hero. I am going to Florence at Mrs. Wilton's request, to make her niece's acquaintance—nothing more. Probably I shall not like Miss Balfour, very probably she will not like me. Mrs. Wilton has no right to make schemes for other people, without their consent, and then to proclaim those schemes as certainties to all the world."

"Dear, dear! she doesn't proclaim her schemes to all the world. How fiery you are! I am, as I said, a friend of the family; it's only natural that Mrs. Wilton should be a little confidential to me."

Then the subject of Miss Balfour was allowed to drop. But other subjects presented themselves and conversation was well sustained through the long dinner.

When at last the girl rose, turned to her neighbour with a bright little motion of the head—between a bow and a nod—and passed out of the room, in the company of the lady in the plum-coloured silk, who honoured the young man with a searching glance, David was astonished to remember how voluble he had been.

Now that his exertions were over, he wondered what to do with himself, and when he should see the friendly stranger again.

He hung about the reading-room; she was not there. He toiled up to his bedroom, looked up paper and pencil, and began a sonnet on a pair of blue eyes, left it unfinished and wandered out.

The moon was shining on the open water before the Riva degli Schiavoni; the fishing boats with their picturesque sails stood out in silver light. But David did not linger—as he once would have lingered—to dream over the scene; he hurried on to the frequented Piazza of St. Mark.

There he watched the crowds passing up and down,

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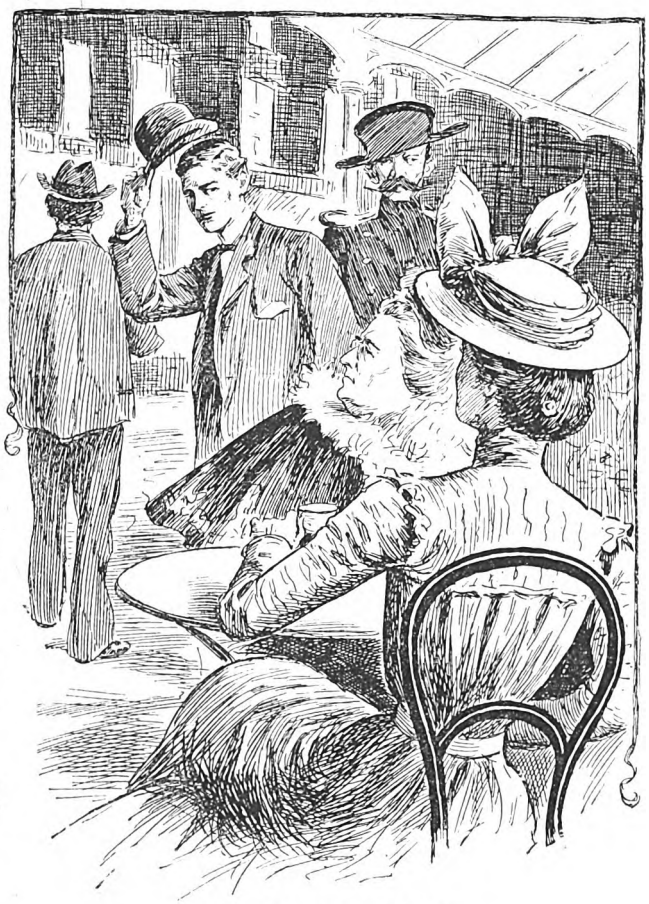
or seated outside the cafès, the officers with their jingling swords, the flower girls, the artists' models, the ladies, the newspaper vendors, the match boys, and the barefooted searchers for cigar ends. He did not tell himself that it was in search of one face that he scanned each group of promenaders or idlers.

But, as in passing one of the tables before the "Cafè Florian" he caught sight of the lady who had accosted him at *table d'hôte*, and who was now sipping coffee and talking with her friend, he felt somehow as if a long search had been rewarded. He raised his hat, and passed on, blushing like a girl when he received a responsive bow and smile.

Then he walked slowly back down the Riva to his hotel, sat up late over his sonnet, tore it up in angry discontent and fell asleep to dream of an animated face, and a pair of bewitching, bright blue eyes.

The days passed quickly. It was glorious autumn weather. Every morning David visited, in obedience to directions in his guide-book, some famous churches or palaces, or he made his way to the studio of a modern artist: every afternoon he followed his own sweet will, strayed along the narrow streets, listened to the voluble sellers and the deprecatory buyers at the shops and stalls near the Rialto, and tried his own inexperienced hand at a bargain, or perhaps he took a gondola and was rowed to the Lido, or some other island of the Lagoons, returning at sunset, when the gold and crimson of the sky were reflected in the water.



He raised his hat and passed on.

At *table d'hôte* he related his adventures to his neighbour, who interrupted him with merry questionings, and who sometimes, if she happened to be in a communicative mood, deigned to respond with narrations of her own doings.

All day long David looked forward to the *tête-à-tête* of the dinner hour. Every evening he went to the Piazza, and marched up and down in solitary state, his eyes continually travelling in one and the same direction, or he sought a table at the *café* where he could furtively watch his new friend, who was pretty sure to be in sight.

In his letters to Whitechapel he never once mentioned her. For one thing he did not know her name. Once, in a fit of more than ordinary curiosity, he had cursorily glanced through the list of names in the "Visitors' Book," but among them all how could he distinguish the one in which he was interested?

The ladies were known by the waiter fraternity of the hotel as *les dames du numéro vingt-cinq*, the number of their sitting-room. When speaking to his neighbour, David had often had at his tongue's tip a downright question concerning her name, but he had hitherto been too shy to utter it. He fully intended to be bolder, one day.

Meanwhile, in his verses—she had found her way into most of his verses written at this period—he chose, for some fanciful reason of his own, to call her "Hera."

It turned out that the length of the girl's stay in Venice was identical with David's; they were both to leave on the same day.

On the last evening in Venice, David and Hera found themselves walking together, and actually unaccompanied, along the Piazza. Mooning along in his usual fashion, the young man had happened to brush against the ladies; as both he and they were bound for the "Angleterre," it was natural that they should walk together.

But the elder lady of the company was presently pounced upon by an Italian countess, who insisted on monopolizing her attention. David moved on with Hera; he could hear a ceaseless stream of foreign-sounding English flowing on behind him.

A strange silence came over the young man. Intently—almost breathlessly—he watched his companion. She had drawn off one of her gloves; on one of her fingers was a ring, with a forget-me-not in turquoises. David wondered, with a touch of utterly unreasonable jealousy, whose hand had placed it there.

The silence seemed oppressive to the girl.

"Let us hurry towards the Riva, and see the moonlight on the water," she said. "Moonlight on water is the most correct of all Venetian beauties."

"Certainly."

David tried to shake off his taciturnity—to emulate his companion's gaiety. But the attempt ended in failure; he was obviously dull and miserable.

"Oh, the beauty of the evening—an evening never to

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pass from David's memory! How grand and solemn the Ducal palace looked in the moonlight! how still was the water, how sweetly came the sound of singing voices from the Grand Canal!

On the top of the steps of one of the many bridges on the Riva both walkers came simultaneously to a standstill.

"So this is our last evening in Venice!" said the girl, resting her arms on the top of the bridge, and looking musingly down into the water.

"Why do you tell me that? surely I know it," burst out David, savagely.

The girl glanced up, startled by the sharpness of his voice.

"What's the matter?"

"Ah me! *Sic transit gloria mundi.*"

"I beg your pardon."

"I beg yours; I was quoting Latin. What I want to say is that—that—the prospect of bidding you good-bye is—well—is the reverse of an enlivening one to me."

"How solemn you are," with a laugh. "And for no reason at all. We shall often meet again."

"Shall we?"

David leant his elbow on the top of the bridge; he bent his head down close to the girl's, her hair almost brushed his cheek.

"Of course," a little impatiently. "My friend and I go to Florence to-morrow, and, as I told you, I am a great friend of Mrs. Wilton's; and I look in upon her every day."

"But I am not going to Mrs. Wilton's."

David spoke in a suppressed voice; he did not raise his head.

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. I cannot go to her now. I had not been a day in Venice before I grew aware of that fact. But I could not—forgive me—resign the pleasure of staying on here with you. My expenses at Venice must be refunded—somehow—" with a grim smile. "You are going to-morrow; then I leave the same day for London."

"Good gracious!"

The girl raised herself from her stooping position.

"How changeable, and how incomprehensible you are! What has happened since you left home to change your plans so suddenly?"

"Everything has happened."

Half-mechanically, Hera had moved on a few paces, and David walked beside her; they descended the bridge steps and made their way slowly along the river.

"You know of—you spoke of—a matrimonial scheme for me which was the cause of Mrs. Wilton's invitation. When I left home I was free; it was at least possible that an introduction to Miss Balfour might, if my advances proved acceptable, end in the accomplishment of my aunt's scheme. Now, all that possibility is over."

"Why over?"

"I am not free now," cried the young man passionately. "Since I have met you I have learnt that Miss Balfour and I could never, at best, be more to each other than good friends."

An inscrutable expression came into the girl's face. She stood still and eyed her companion searchingly.

"Surely," she said, "if you oppose your aunt's plans, you will injure your prospects for life."

"Yes," answered David with simple candour. "My mother will be sorely disappointed; she had hoped so much from my aunt's new interest in me. I am sorry for my mother, but I don't fear the future for myself if ——" David broke off.

"Won't you wait till you see Miss Balfour, before you decide on opposing your aunt's views?"

"Why should I see her?" vehemently, "the very thought of Miss Balfour is hideous to me."

"And how shall you explain your change of plans to Mrs. Wilton?"

"Explain! I shall write and tell her the truth—shall say I have met you."

The girl's lips parted in a curious smile; she stood stock-still, facing David in the moonlight.

"Whom shall you say that you have met?" she asked, lifting her eyes suddenly to her companion's face.

"I—I—don't know; a thousand times I have wanted to ask your name. Will you tell it me now?" faltered David humbly.

"To be sure. I am Joyce Balfour."

"Joyce Balfour!"

If a thunderbolt had fallen at David's feet he could hardly have been more astounded. If ever he were dumbfounded in his life, he was so at this crisis of his fate.

A merry laugh recalled his wandering wits.

"Yes, I am Joyce Balfour and Mrs. Wilton's ward; it is Mrs. Wilton with whom I am staying at the 'Angleterre.' I never expected to remain unknown to you so long; men are slow at guessing; a woman would have found us out long ago. Why, there were a thousand ways of learning our names, and I often wondered why you didn't ask me mine, downright. When we first heard that you were going to stay in Venice, I persuaded Mrs. Wilton to come over here and make your acquaint-

"I am Joyce Balfour."

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ance under the rose. It was no more pleasant to me than to you, I can tell you, to be under orders in matters matrimonial to Mrs. Wilton. I was no more willing to accept your advances than you were to offer them. At least, I wanted, before we were formally introduced, to know you for myself, in my own way; to see you and talk with you when you were off your guard. It is of course for you to say"—with an arch glance in David's direction—"whether you will abide by your decision to return to England to-morrow. But at least, sir"—with a saucy smile and a bright look in the blue eyes—"you will please apologize very humbly for your assurance in stating before my very face that the thought of Joyce Balfour is hideous to you."

We suppose that David's apology proved an ample one. At any rate we know that a year after the events related in our story, David was not only installed steward of Mrs. Wilton's estates in Devonshire and Somerset, but that he was also married to Miss Balfour. The first volume of poems which he offered to the world had a dedication, "To my wife Joyce."

ANNETTE CALTHROP.

THE TWO BAMBOOS.

BY the side of the Bay of Yedo (as we are telling old stories we like to keep to old names) on a beautiful bank, ablaze with the colours of the azalea, the iris, and the camellia, grew two bamboo trees. The one was tall, lusty, and strong, the other was graceful, drooping and tender.

Said the stronger to the weaker:

"I should like to know what good you are. The smallest breeze makes you bend your head almost double and sigh with pain. Look at me! I don't care what wind blows or what storm comes from the sea. I can face them and feel better for it."

The slender bamboo at his side who was as modest and retiring as she was graceful and beautiful, replied:

"Yes, we are each suited to our vocation in life. You will be a stout coolie pole."

"Coolie pole, forsooth!" snorted her neighbour contemptuously. "Not I."

"And I," continued the slender bamboo, "I shall be used to decorate a house at the New Year festival if I'm to be used at all."

"Don't you count on that," roughly said the big bamboo; "they'll make you into mats, or a coolie's rain coat, or something or other low. Why, look here, you're fit for nothing else."

As he spoke a strong breeze came in from the sea and made the whole hillside quiver and sigh, all but the stout bamboo, who merely bent his head as much as to say:

"Go on, go on, it pleases you and doesn't hurt me!" whilst the poor little one at his side bent and swayed, and groaned heavily to see so many of her tender leaves swept away.

Time went on. The wood-cutters came.

"Orra! Orra!" they cried, "here's a fine fellow for Hinashi's junk; we'll get ten-pence for him!"

"Told you so," whispered the big bamboo to the little one. "Now for life! Hurrah! anything rather than stop on this monotonous old bank, spending the best years of one's life in listening to your groanings."

The axes were plied, and he fell with a thundering crash. Then he was stripped of his branches and shaped, and in a few days was sailing merrily over the blue waters of the bay, as happy as could be.

Meanwhile the slender bamboo grew more graceful and more beautiful every day, and the village children came to play under her shade, for they had learnt to love her, and called her their "Silver Spray."

One day there was a great hullabaloo in the plantation, such a whispering and chattering amongst the azaleas and camellias as had never been heard before, for the azaleas and camellias are enemies and rarely speak to one another.

"They're going to build a house here for the Prince of Tosa," replied the tree, "and we're all to be swept away."

"O, dear! O, dear!" said the bamboo, "that's a bad business; I wish I had been born stout and strong, and I would have been a junk mast instead of being carried away to heat baths."

And the next day the wood-cutters came and the work of destruction commenced. Down upon the sand were thrown the beautiful flowers and the graceful clusters of leaves; the little bamboo trembled as she saw her friends falling around her, and wondered when her turn would come.

At length the destroyers approached her, and one man was swinging his axe in the air to give her the fatal blow, when a chorus of child voices was heard:

"No, don't kill 'Silver Spray'! please don't!"

And the man dropped his arms, and she was saved.

The children dug her out and carried her to a beautiful garden, where they planted her on a bank overlooking the sea.

One day a dreadful storm arose. The blue water was churned into dark green mountains of waves capped with white foam; the wind blew furiously, and in all directions junks could be seen flying to the nearest point of shelter. It was a terrible time for all the trees and plants around, but the bamboo was sheltered by a high bank of purple iris.

Next morning the shore presented a woeful appearance, for it was strewn with timbers, and masts, and torn sails, and even dead bodies of men; and amongst the remains the bamboo recognised her big, strong companion of old days, badly bruised and cracked in many places. As the men dragged him up to the foot of the garden, he saw her and said:

"Ah! I wish I had been a coolie pole."

And he was cut up for firewood; but the slender bamboo flourished many years after, and when she heard boasting going on around her would often tell the story of her strong, lusty companion.

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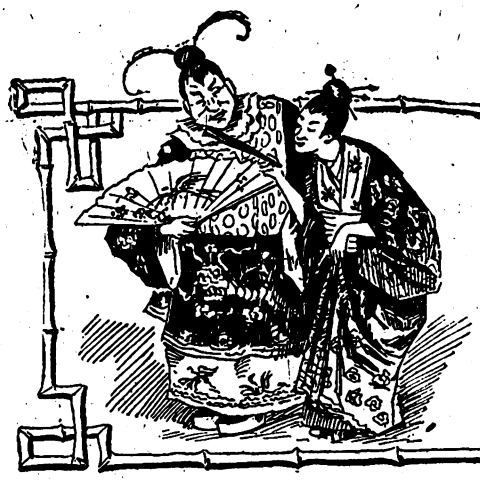

Mr. Bowser's Tribulations.

XXXIV.—HE EXPERIMENTS WITH A BOON FOR ALL MANKIND.

AFTER dinner, during which he had seemed much preoccupied, Mr. Bowser had passed through the kitchen into the back yard and poured about two pails of water into an empty barrel. The cook looked at him suspiciously from the half-open door, and Mrs. Bowser wondered what he was up to, but nothing was said until he had taken off his shoes and settled down for the evening. He had been aching for ten minutes to be questioned when Mrs. Bowser observed:

"Are they going to shut the water off from this street to repair the pipes?"

"Not that I know of," he replied. "Look here, now, I want to tell you something, and I don't want you to shout 'fad' over it and call me a silly. I think I've got hold of a big thing. In fact, I believe I am about to produce a boon for all mankind!"

"Going to turn water into champagne?"

"There you go with a sneer in your voice! My goodness, woman, you do provoke me! Why can't you give me a word of encouragement in seeking to win fame and riches?"

"Well, tell me all about it, and I'll give you my opinion."

Mr. Bowser picked up the cat and pulled her tail in an absent-minded way and finally said:

"You know what snow is, of course. It's useful enough out in some foreign countries where they want to draw logs to the saw-mill; but it is a source of expense to the amount of thousands of pounds in the cities. It costs London city alone about £50,000 to get rid of her winter's snow. The snow must be shovelled up and carted off, you see."

"Yes I see."

"Well, suppose the snow could be melted on the streets and in the yards and the water run off into the rivers, suppose it could be done for about a hundredth part of the expense of removal—would there be world-wide fame and any amount of money for the inventor of the process or nothing?"

"It would be a splendid idea," said Mrs. Bowser.

He returned with three bottles and a gallon jug.

"Now you are talking. Now you are offering the encouragement to your husband expected of a wife. I tell you, my dear woman, I wouldn't sell my secret for a million pounds."

"You can melt the snow on the streets, can you?"

"I can melt it as fire melts grease. I can clean a whole city street with one barrel of fluid! I can melt snow for about a farthing a ton. It's a discovery that will knock the world off its feet."

"And how did you discover the process?" asked Mrs. Bowser, as she kept a serious face.

"Partly by means of an old manuscript left by a sailor who died in the hospital, and partly by a man who was out of work and was willing to part with his information for a sovereign. It's a certain thing and within two hours I'll be melting ice to prove it."

"Well, I hope there's something in it."

"Something in it! My dear woman, where I start with one barrel of water I'll end up with ten barrels of gold. Your words of encouragement have done wonders for me. I must now go to the chemist's for a few ingredients."

He went, and returned with three bottles and a gallon jar, the contents of which were poured into the barrel. Mrs. Bowser still further encouraged him by coming down stairs to see him pour and stir and mix, and the cook was kind enough to remark that Mr. Bowser looked like a man who would not knowingly blow up or set fire to his own house in order to kill off a poor girl working for twelve pounds a year. It was an hour before the experiment was ready. The dead sailor's manuscript and the hard-up man's advice were to the effect that the mixture need not stand more than ten minutes, but Mr. Bowser wanted to make a certain thing of it.

The stuff had a rank, acid smell, but he sniffed at it as heartily as if it had been eau de Cologne. A lump of ice was bought from the fish shop and laid on the ground, and with a great deal of solemnity he dipped a stick with a sponge tied to the end of it in the barrel and sopped it over the ice. There was no explosion or

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sudden outburst of flame. Even the cat tiptoed forward and smelt the lump.

Of course, ice won't melt as quickly as snow, and in his own mind Mr. Bowser gave that lump three minutes to vanish off the cold earth. The liquid honeycombed it and threw out a tan-yard odour, but there was no melting.

"What seems to be the matter?" Mrs. Bowser finally queried.

"I—I may not have put enough on," replied Mr. Bowser as he renewed the sop with a liberal hand. "There can't be any mistake in the mixing, and the thing is bound to work. Can't you keep that beastly cat away?"

The cat was chased away, and there was another painful period of waiting. The ice could be heard cracking, but there was no melting.

"Perhaps the discovery only alluded to very soft snow," suggested Mrs. Bowser.

"Soft snow be hanged!" he shouted. "I tell you this thing is all right. The stuff I put in cost five shillings, and it's bound to work."

"Then why doesn't it work? And if it cost five shillings for two pails full how are you going to make it pay? It strikes me——"

"Oh, yes, you are always being struck!" he interrupted. And this very minute you are hoping I will make a failure of this thing. But I won't, though. Perhaps it needs more stirring."

He seized the stick and stirred and swirled and poked, and again the lump of ice was cracked. The smell was ranker, but that was the only result.

"Perhaps the dying sailor left the wrong manuscript?" said Mrs. Bowser by way of breaking the painful silence.

"Why don't he take a teakettle of hot water to melt it?" queried the cook.

"By the living jingo she'll work or bust!" shouted Mr. Bowser as a wave of anger surged over him. "Stand back and gimme room."

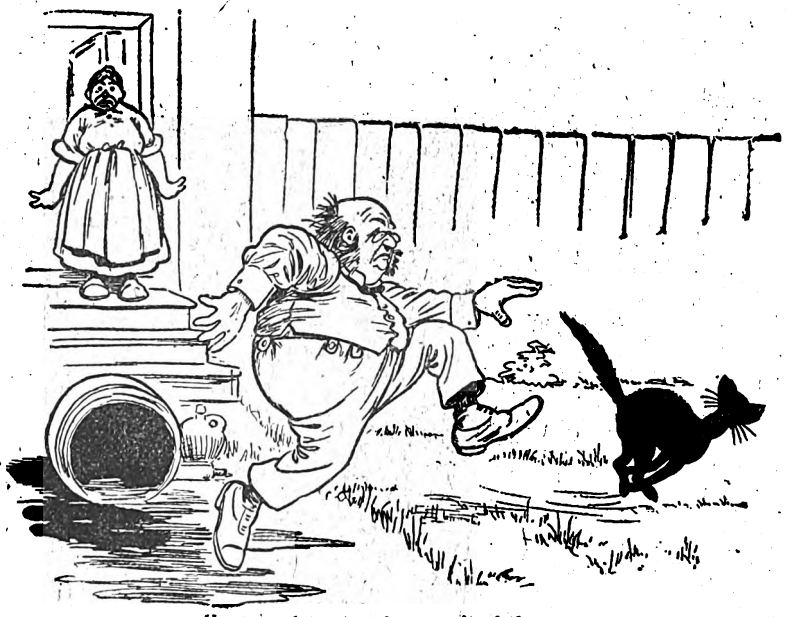
He seized the barrel with a strong grip and up ended it over the lump of ice and then gave it a kick that sent it flying across the yard. Mrs. Bowser and the cook had retreated to a safe distance, but the cat had advanced to satisfy her feline curiosity. As the barrel went rolling the cat screamed out and began jumping up and down, but in half-a-minute changed from jumping to a wild career about the yard.

"You ought to be ashamed to kick a cat!" exclaimed Mrs. Bowser, as the cavorting went on.

"I never kicked her!" he replied. "What in thunder can ail her? Gimme a stick till I drive her over the fence."

He was looking about for a weapon when he gave a sudden start. Then he uttered an exclamation and tried to lift both feet off the ground at once. Then he kicked off his shoes and seemed to start in pursuit of the cat, and he had circled the yard twice before Mrs. Bowser and the cook grabbed him.

"Water—a pail of water—my feet!" he howled, and as soon as the water was drawn he plunged his feet into the pail.



He seemed to start in pursuit of the cat.

"Now then, will you explain this circus?" asked Mrs. Bowser as a look of relief came to his face.

"The acid got to my feet," he replied. "There was a gallon of acid, you know. The cat must have stepped into a puddle of it."

Mrs. Bowser got out the bottle of sweet oil and some rags, and the blistered feet were made comfortable, and their sole owner and proprietor hobbled upstairs and stretched himself out on the sofa. Mrs. Bowser hadn't called him a lunatic or an idiot, but he felt that he had lost prestige and must regain it. She was still soothing him when he sat up and pointed a finger at her and hoarsely whispered:

"Woman, I understand all!"

"All about melting snow?" she innocently asked.

"All about why my experiment was a failure. Don't seek to hide your guilt by looking at me in that bold-faced way. While I was gone to the chemist's you sneaked down and put salt or ashes or vinegar or something into that barrel."

"How foolish of you!"

"That will do! Denials are useless. You can go home to your mother by the 10.20 train to-morrow, and my lawyer will notify you of the legal steps I take. Woman, avaunt and leave your victim to die in peace!"

And, having squared himself and accounted for the failure of his experiment, Mr. Bowser drew up his legs and fell into a peaceful slumber. M. QUAD.

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THE LION'S WARS

The Campaign in the Pyrenees and South of France. 1813—1814.

THE flight of his brother Joseph, and the expulsion of his armies from the Peninsula, stirred the ambitious soul of Napoleon Bonaparte to its profoundest depths. He knew, none better, that successes won by the sword have to be maintained by the sword, so large reinforcements were at once dispatched and the whole of the forces in Spain placed under the command of Soult, the ablest, with the exception perhaps of Bernadotte, afterwards King of Sweden, of all Napoleon's marshals.

On taking command Soult at once proceeded to Pamplona, which we were investing. The folly which had characterised the operations of the French in the Peninsular War was at once made manifest. The French had never been able to strike a really decisive blow, because their generals could never agree in concerting plans of action.

At Pamplona Soult bore down in overwhelming force on the passes of Maya held by the British, and drove us back.

Greatly elated, Soult, a week later, on July 13th, 1813, dispatched the Comte D'Erlon with 18,000 men to eject us from Puerto de Maya, but, bent on retrieving the reverse at Maya, Sir W. Stewart's troops, 4,500 strong, stood their ground, till most of them were either killed or wounded.

At Roncesvalles, fought on the same day, fortune was a little kinder. General Cole and 10,000 men, confronted by General Clausel and 35,000 picked French troops, fought for six hours with such desperate valour, that, when Cole retreated to take up a more advantageous position, the French were too exhausted to follow him.

Pitted against a commander of such acknowledged ability as Soult, the British Army now clamoured for Wellington, who, on July 27th, arrived from San Sebastian.

His return greatly cheered our men, who gave him a most enthusiastic welcome.

Sir William Napier says that such was Wellington's resourcefulness that on this occasion he actually made a strategic use of his soldiers' greeting. Turning to one of his staff whilst his men were hurrahing he said, "Soult is a cautious soldier, and will delay his attack to ascertain the cause of these shouts. This will give time for the Sixth Division to arrive, and I shall beat him."

What followed showed how accurately Wellington had gauged his opponent's character. Soult did notice the cheering, and did pause sufficiently long to allow the Sixth Division under General Pack to arrive.

Then without a moment's delay Wellington seized the heights on the valley of the Lanz, and placed a large force on the edge of the valley to prevent the French from massing their entire army for one grand attack.

Soult, after disengaging a division to watch the force we had posted at the entrance to the valley, burst on the army under Wellington, and was repulsed with great loss. But the Portuguese stationed on our right had been a little shaky, seeing which, a strong column of French came up from Sorauren. The Portuguese, it is

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declared, did not on this occasion exhibit the white feather. For all this, they were no match for the French, who pressed them back with such vigour that they were thrown upon General Ross's brigade.

Re-animated by the calmness displayed by our men, the Portuguese reformed and charged the French so desperately as to force them down the hill. Quite undismayed, the French regained the hill, carrying all before them till, meeting Byng's brigade, they were checked.

At this moment no fewer than three French divisions had made good their footing on the heights, and unless we could dislodge them the battle would be lost. Silently, sternly, our men formed into line, waited till the order to advance was given, and then, spite of a withering fire, began steadily climbing the hill. Arrived at the summit, they rushed at the foe with such headlong valour, that they drove the French to the verge on the other side.

For a moment both the combatants paused hovering on the brink, and then the French were hurled into the valley below, in one inextricable mass.

Although the French suffered severely in the hand to hand fighting which followed, great was the dismay when it was found that the failure of two Portuguese regiments to prevent any further reinforcements arriving from Sorauren had resulted in the heights being silently scaled by the French brigade on one side, whilst we were sweeping their comrades from the other.

Tired as our men were, and fierce as was the tempest of bullets rained on us as we re-ascended the heights, we contrived after three heroic efforts to bundle out the intruders.

On landing in the valley, the French met the Sixth Division returning from pursuing their comrades. Another desperate fight ensued, but repeated doses of cold steel at length decided the day.

Reinforcements poured in at such a rate after this battle that Wellington found himself at the head of an army of 50,000 men, of whom quite half were British. But so many of these had to be sent away for the investment of the frontier towns, that when Soult's reinforcements also arrived the French force was nearly double that of our own.

Soult's great object in the operations which followed was to relieve St. Sebastian and keep open his communications with France. To achieve the former he planted a force between the British and the river Baztan. To retain the road to France he transferred the bulk of his army to Orthez, in order to effect a junction with D'Erlon.

But Wellington noticed the movement towards Orthez and guessed the object. The division he sent under Picton, to prevent the junction, marched so rapidly that they were able to seize Orthez. The French immediately retreated, leaving us in possession.

Soult had hoped that his retreat would have enabled him to raise the siege of St. Sebastian, and he was greatly surprised to find that Wellington had re-occupied Puerto de Maya fortress.

On the night of August 30th, 1813, Wellington carried the town by storm. The resistance we encountered from the French garrison was so aided by the co-operation of the townspeople, that our men became so infuriated that, when they did get inside, they perpetrated the most dreadful excesses. Not only was the town given up to pillage, but bands of soldiers went from house to house murdering every inhabitant they found.

Bad as their conduct was, it must be admitted that they had good cause for indignation, "As we had no quarrel with the townspeople, and as we came to Spain to free their country from the French," said a soldier who had been caught red-handed, and brought to Wellington, "they ought either to have remained neutral or fought for us. We have lost about 2,000 men to-day, and we have killed about the same number. If the punishment the townpeople have received isn't what people call retribution, blow me if I know what the word means."

The inhabitants of St. Sebastian, in not helping the soldiers who were risking their lives to rid Spain of the invaders, showed gross ingratitude. When they supplemented this by also killing us, who shall say that our men were not justified in taking the law into their own hands.

The winter of 1813, even in Southern France was so intensely cold, that operations had now to be suspended. When February arrived Wellington had completed his plans.

He would have liked to have marched straight on to Paris, but Bayonne was in the way. A series of masterly manœuvres compelled Soult to retire from the town, under the shelter of which he had stationed his camp during January, and retreat to Orthez, where, on the 14th February, he again tried conclusion with our invincible soldiers.

That the French after so many defeats should have made so good a fight as they did, shows of what splendid stuff the French soldier of that day was made. They lost of course, but they fought like heroes.

Our men, if they did not believe that they were the best soldiers in the world, were quite sure that Wellington was the best commander. In charging, this confidence made them irresistible. Our men loved getting to close quarters, but it was costly work.

Six times did our dauntless veterans at Orthez, led by the gallant Ross, force their way through the vine-clad cottages and gardens to be, when they reached the open ground at the rear of the village, hurled back again by a battery of French guns which were posted on a hill close by. They could have faced the guns in front, but there was a battery of sixteen guns on the Dax Road on their right which rent great gaps in their ranks.

But the British soldier is never so dangerous as when called on to fulfil an almost impossible task. Picton sent a reinforcement—they were immediately swept away.

Wellington then dispatched assistance. Those who were not annihilated by the guns went down before a wild charge of the French. Still our men persevered although Soult had loudly declared, "At last I have the English."

The moment Wellington, to draw the French from St. Boes, assailed their left, we made a wild rush at the hill which had defied us all through that dreadful day, and the bayonet did the rest. The attack on the left was equally successful.

The road was now open to Paris, but as it would have been dangerous to have allowed Soult, who had retreated eastwards to Toulouse, to escape and thus threaten our communications, Wellington determined to reduce that town.

The fortifications of Toulouse would have been useless against modern ordnance, but Wellington's guns were not only of poor calibre but he found the high wall which ran round the town strongly flanked with towers.

Furthermore, the place derived additional support

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So murderous was the fire that the leading ranks, unable to face it, sprang into a hollow road twenty-five feet deep.

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from its position. Except at one point, it was protected by the Garonne, a deep unfordable river, and the canal of Brienne on the north, east and west. The weakness of the south side had been remedied by strong fortifications.

Not daring to defend the city from the inside, which might lead to his forces being shut up for months, Soult took up a strong position on two lofty ridges outside the town, the natural strength of which he increased by redoubts and field works. Between the two ridges the ground sloped to a valley, leading to the town of Toulouse.

Wellington, on reconnoitring, found that the number of forts and redoubts Soult had erected on the first ridge, which was over two miles long, would enable the French to pour in such a deadly fire, that he resolved on risking a night attack. But the distances some of the brigades had to travel was so great, that when the sun rose on the morning of April 10th, the attack had not yet begun.

Whilst our infantry were plodding steadily up the hill Beresford's Dragoons and Somerset's Hussars crept round by the valley in order to take the enemy in flank. But owing to the water-courses travelling was made almost impossible.

When the retreat was sounded, our men had to leave their guns behind them in the marshes. Their safety would have been endangered had not Wellington dispatched Vivian's cavalry brigade to attack the bridge of Bordes.

This division drew off the enemy and enabled Beresford's and Somerset's troops to get clear of the valley higher up, and, on leaving the valley, to storm and capture the bridge of Montandron.

Freyne, acting without instructions, assailed, and marched round the first ridge and, at the head of 9,000 Spanish assaulted the second. Our allies fought well enough for a time although the big guns of the French made huge gaps in their ranks, but when the bridge of Matabiau was reached, so murderous was the fire to which they were exposed, that the leading ranks, unable to face it, sprang into a hollow road twenty-five feet deep.

The whole force at once became panic-stricken; a few sheltered themselves behind a neighbouring bank, but the bulk joined their companions in the road below.

The moment they disappeared from view, the French rushed from their intrenchments, and disposing themselves round the brink, poured volley after volley into the helpless crowd beneath. The exultation of the French knew no bounds, and they showed no quarter.

A battery of guns was brought up from the Matabiau, and the hollow road raked from end to end. The annals of war record nothing more horrible than the butchery of the Spanish at Toulouse.

Strange as it may seem, Wellington's foresight was so great, that the moment he saw the Spanish troops approaching the fatal spot, he turned to an officer and said: "Did you ever see 9,000 soldiers run away?"

"No, sir."

"Wait a moment, and you will."

Wellington at once ordered up a couple of regiments to the rescue of the poor wretches who rushed madly away as soon as the French turned their attention to the new comers. The British silently opened their ranks to let the fugitives pass, and then proceeded to punish the French for their cruelty by endeavouring to drive them into the very death-trap which had proved so fatal to the poor Spaniards. They did not succeed in this, but on getting to close quarters they punished the enemy so severely that they literally bolted back to their intrenchments.

But the tide of battle had not yet turned in our favour. The fiery Picton had been instructed to make a feigned attack on the bridge of Juneaux in order to divert attention from Hill's attack on the ridge. Feigned attacks were so little to Picton's tastes that he endeavoured to rush the bridge in earnest. The works protecting the bridge being too high to scale without a ladder, the French sharpshooters were able to kill and wound some 400 of our gallant fellows before Picton could be prevailed on to retire.

Our position now was anything but hopeful. The dispersion of the Spanish army, and the repulse of Picton, enabled Soult to act on the offensive. Fifteen thousand men were hurled on Beresford's flank at the bridge of Montandron, Vial's cavalry encircling them on the other side.

An iron circle was being slowly drawn round them, when Beresford's men burst through, and before Vial's cavalry could charge, formed squares. At this critical moment Lambart's Brigade, which had reached the summit of the second ridge, seeing the deadly peril of Beresford's Division rushed down the hill with such force as to utterly disorganise Taupin's men, the discomfiture being greatly increased by the death of Taupin himself.

Then the 42nd and 79th Highland regiments came up, and the French had to bear as best they could one of the ugly rushes for which the Scotch soldiers are famous.

From end to end the ridges were now alive with red coats, such of the French as remained on the summit being swept down the hill-side like a torrent. Then we stormed the redoubts.

In capturing these the loss of life was awful. The 42nd having dispersed thrice their number at the bridge of Montandron turned their attention to a neighbouring redoubt. They went into action with 500 men. After the battle only ninety were left.

Towards evening the French so lost heart that to prevent a rout Soult retired into Toulouse. Next day before Wellington could invest the town Soult had retreated to Careassonne. Whilst Wellington was marching into Toulouse the French garrison, on the 14th, made a night attack on the investing force under Sir John Hope. Taken completely by surprise they penetrated our camp, killing General Hay and numerous other officers, besides taking Colonel Townsend and other officers prisoners. Hundreds of our men also were bayoneted in their sleep.

The darkness was so great that it was not till some of the tents caught fire that the British could tell friend from foe. Cheered by their officers, we soon retrieved the position. General Hope, a man of herculean strength, slew, it is said, more men that night than the renowned Shaw is reported to have done at Waterloo. Ultimately the French were driven back with such slaughter that out of the sortie party only one third returned.

The abdication of Napoleon and the Restoration of Louis XVIII. put an end to the war, and the British Army (with the exception of the cavalry who marched to Boulogne and those destined for the colonies) embarked at Bordeaux receiving a hearty welcome on reaching home.

[NEXT WEEK: **The Battle of Waterloo (June 18, 1815)**]

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THE SHIP'S DOCTOR.

WHEN first I met him he had long left the sea. Spare, with grizzled hair and moustache, he showed plainly the marks of his old occupation.

There were the rolling gait, the tanned, seamy features, the keenness of eye, which somehow are the almost invariable signs of the men who go down to the sea in ships.

Add to this that he was shabby, woefully so, and that from the moment he had emptied his first glass of "Jamaica" hot, his talk went on without ceasing to the complete drowning of every other voice, and you have a very fair picture of the man as I knew him.

At this time, too, he acted as occasional assistant to a "cheap" doctor in a poor neighbourhood. Two days in the week he came over "West," from the salubrious quarter that has Victoria Park for its centre, and did the dirty work his employer had no fancy for doing himself. As a matter of fact, poor old Burroughs was a far cleverer man in his profession than ever was Peter McGowan, M.D., the employer aforesaid; but he was his own enemy, and a life that might have been lived with the greatest advantage to himself, to those belonging to him, and to society generally, was simply frittered away without being of use to anybody.

His strong point was "tall yarns," so tall, so overpowering in altitude, that his hearers (and he was always the centre of an awe-struck group of listeners on club nights) were carried to heights, the safe descent from which seemed so problematical as to engender grave fears in the minds of timid souls.

Well past sixty, he had not married and settled down until about two years before I came across him.

His wife, so rumour had it, had been a barmaid, with a profound admiration for the ex-salt-water "Æsculapius." Rumour said also that the lady's "little savings" had furnished the home, but as that is a mere detail, and moreover, has about it the elements of scandal, the statement may be taken for what it is worth.

I am to this day quite unacquainted with Mrs. Burroughs, and therefore cannot speak from personal experience, but I should say, from certain plain indications, that she had done much during her short spell of married life to "pull together" her lord and master.

Without doubt he needed considerable application of the process, and although his little failings still cropped up now and again, he distinctly showed that there was a firm hand somewhere in the background steering the ship.

Apart, then, from an undue leaning towards the "convivial" and a spirit of an utter indifference with regard to appearances and his "outer man," Ned Burroughs was undeniably a taking personality. Witty, an accomplished linguist (to my knowledge, he knew and spoke well five languages) a *raconteur*, than whom I know none better, he was the life and soul of the club to which we both belonged.

I can see him now, in his favourite seat by the window, and surrounded by a group of eager-eared men, discoursing wonderful things, in his own magnetically wonderful manner.

Stories of all kinds, shark stories, "bush" stories; adventures in the "Rockies," and encounters with "Polars" in the Arctic Seas; he was great in all—while there were simple souls among us who scorned to doubt, listened rapt, and accepting with childlike faith poor Ned's "largest order."

I do not suppose that any man, woman, or child who once came in contact with him, failed to love him. A lovable man may be pardoned the committing of many sins; there is a tendency to look at him from your blind side; and so Ned Burroughs held, by virtue of his warm heart, his winsome attractiveness of disposition, a big place in the affectionate regard of all who knew him.

Now, if there was one thing that the "doctor" had an especial fondness for, it was children. Little children, wee toddlers of that fascinating age, when, too old for "worriment," and too young for mischief, they insensibly wind themselves round the heart of every man worthy the name.

It was this predilection that led to his final undoing, or shall I rather say, to the doing of that which will make his name to be known among men for all time, as that of one of earth's true kings and heroes.

He was always reticent upon his home life, and I, for one, ever respected his reserve.

That Burroughs had a child of his own, a little chap of three or thereabouts, everybody knew, as too, everybody could not but see the glistening tenderness in his eyes whenever he referred to his infant son. Then it was that he put aside for a while the weaving of new marvels, and enlarged upon the present precocity and certain future greatness of his little heir.

It was on a bitterly cold night in January, just five years ago now, that the incident I am about to relate had its beginning.

There was an unusually large number of members present, and Burroughs, upon the stroke of eleven, was in the throes of adventurous relation.

The scene of this story was laid in Constantinople, the yarn itself being of such intensely thrilling nature that reason and belief trembled on their respective thrones.

"It was nearly midnight," he was saying in that winningly impressive way of his, that half-compelled, half-persuaded the doubter among his auditors, "it was nearly midnight when I left the ship quietly in a 'cacique,' whispering the boatman to make for a point a little below Damietta. By the light of a small bull's-eye lantern I read again the fair Zuleika's letter. Yes, a quarter after midnight I was to be at the little door in the garden wall, at the top of the river steps. There I was to knock three times, utter the name 'Zuleika,' and the door would be opened by an old negress, the lady's special attendant. After that, implicit trust in what should follow."

"Here! I say, doctor! do you mean to tell us that a beautiful Turkish houri wrote you a letter like that?" interrupted a sceptic.

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"Let the doctor alone, Bruce, he's getting on splendidly, if you'll only be quiet," remonstrated a believer.

"Wrote me a letter like that—why if I told you, which I don't mean to, all there was in it, you'd be more than surprised, I'm thinking. Well, the boat arrived at the flight of steps leading up to the little door. The moon shone so brightly that it was nearly as light as day. I sprang up the steps, and knocked thrice at the iron-studded wicket. Then speaking the word 'Zuleika' I waited. In less than a moment I saw the door slowly open inwards, in its place appearing a horribly ugly old negress, who——"

"Yes, yes, go on!" cried the now excited circle of listeners, for Burroughs had suddenly stopped.

But he took not the slightest notice of them.

In the doorway stood a tall, good-looking girl of, maybe, sixteen, who simply looked appealingly at the doctor, he being seated exactly facing her.

His response to this mute address was curious.

Clapping his shabby old sombrero-like wide-awake on to his head, he rose quickly from his chair and without a word of apology or explanation to his fellow members, moved as quickly across the room towards the girl, whom he caught hold of by the wrist and hurried out, shutting the door after him.

As to what happened next I am dependent upon the report of one who saw through it all to the end.

Within easy distance of the club was, indeed is, a district notorious for its poverty, its wretchedness, some say its crime.

It is towards this that Burroughs and his young companion make as fast as the slippery state of the pavement will allow them.

Appleton Buildings is their objective point, a block of so-called model dwellings, hidden away behind the more imposing screen of fine shops of the main road.

The doctor knows the place well. Only that afternoon he has been there, leaving with a conviction almost that there would be no need for a re-visit.

Out of the glare and busy brightness of the great thoroughfare, and by way of a narrow bye-street into the dreary region surrounding the "buildings" aforesaid.

What a ghastly mockery is this pretence in the housing of the poor! What a need is there for not only a capitalist and philanthropist, but for a philanthropist with intimate and personal knowledge of the class he would seek to benefit!

In his own queer, restless way, Burroughs had thought much on this question, therein differing greatly from his pompous chief, McGowan, who cared for none of these things, and as he and Nelly Garvy threaded their way through alley-way and court, ultimately emerging on to the paper-strewn yard of Appleton Buildings, he reviled Dives in his heart, for that the rich man was blind in all his works.

Up, up, up to the topmost storey of the very dirtiest of all the dirty blocks of the poor man's barracks.

Burroughs, as a man, was a Bohemian, and, therefore, not particularly keen in the matter of ultra-cleanliness and order, but as a doctor his whole soul revolted at the despite done to every known law of health and decency.

Moreover, his sympathetic spirit had been deeply stirred by the patient endurance of the little sufferer whom he had now come for the third time to visit, and if it might be, to lure back to life.

That the chances in favour of this were but small he knew only too well. There was but one road to follow one only possible thing to do, which thing would be at once unpleasant, and done at the risk of the operator's life.

Poor Susy Garvy, barely nine, and as yet scarce acquaint with a world none too well disposed to such as she, lay gasping for breath, the terrible sound of which, caused by that fatal formation in the throat which is the terror alike of doctor and patient.

Only last year, Susy had participated in one of those wonderful "Fresh Air" excursions, and the memory of that day, the beauty of it is the one thing now that appeals most strongly to her wandering little mind.

A swift glance at the face of the child; a hand touch of wrist and forehead, and Ned Burroughs saw that the moment had come for decisive action.

Risk *versus* self! It was very simple, and although it is a matter for thankfulness that there exist souls, many, many souls far and away above consideration of self where duty is to be done, the number of God's heroes who will deliberately stake their lives for another's good is, and must be in the very nature of things, limited.

Two hours after the doctor's exit from our midst, I was summoned by the porter.

I found at the door inside a four-wheeler, a transformed man.

All frivolous, laughter-loving expression gone, Ned Burroughs, his hand on the lowered window of the cab, his face set as with a great purpose, addressed me hurriedly:

"Chalmers! I can't come inside; I fear I am going be very ill—I am going at once to the hospital."

"Aren't you going home?" I said.

"Home!—No—not home!—I've written my address on this piece of paper," passing it out to me. "Do me the kindness of writing a line to my wife, and tell her the truth as gently as I know you can. But don't go and see her. I have my reasons. Will you promise me that you won't go and see her?"

"Of course, if you so wish it," I said. "But are you suffering much?"

"No, not yet—not yet—but it will come, and if I should never have the opportunity of speaking to you again, my last word to you is that I do not regret it; no, thank Heaven, I do not regret it."

Could this be the Ned Burroughs of a few hours ago? Transformed, did I say? rather transfigured! for if ever a human being revealed in his face the divinity which is said to belong, howsoever latently, to every child of man, then did I assuredly see the divine that night in the person of Edward Burroughs, ex-ship's doctor.

A day or two later we heard the truth. How that he had performed, by personal inhalement, that terrible operation of withdrawing the cord from the throat of a diptheitic patient.

Signally successful, the child came back to life from that moment.

But poor Ned! he died in his wife's arms at St. Mildreds on that night week.

As a friend and club member we shall never replace him; I know I shall not, and when sometimes his memory is strong upon us, as it often is, we drink in sad silence to a name which needs no eulogy, in that each of us has a warm heart-corner for it, that of our dear old comrade the "ship's doctor."

RALPH ENDERBY.

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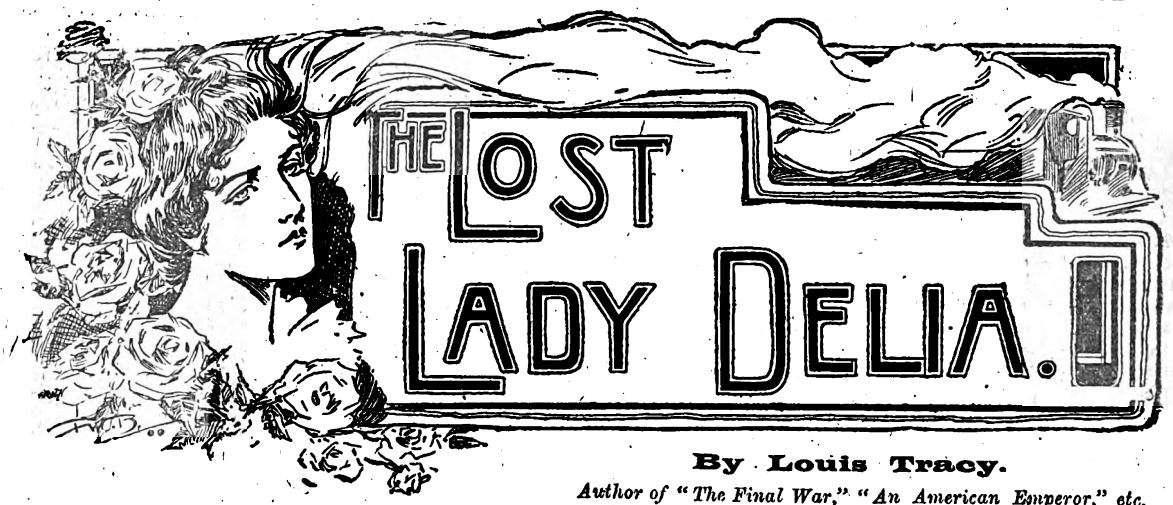
GRAND SERIAL STORY. START TO-DAY.



By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

SUMMARY.

LADY DELIA LYLE leaves her house one foggy November afternoon, and is seen at Victoria Station, on the Underground Railway, by Mr. Reginald Brett, a barrister friend of her husband, who gets her ticket and puts her in the train for Richmond, where she says she is going to see her sister, but from that time she is not heard of.

After some days have passed, without bringing any news of Lady Delia, her husband, Sir Charles Lyle, puts the matter into the hands of detectives, Inspector Winter taking charge of the case.

Brett also promises to do all he can, and he finds out that Lady Delia, on the night of her disappearance, instead of going to Richmond, alighted at Sloane Square, and went to a block of flats called Raleigh Mansions.

Towards the end of the month the body of a woman, evidently murdered, is found wedged beneath a drain-pipe in the Thames at Putney, and, though Sir Charles does not identify the body, Brett imagines it to be that of Lady Delia. Shortly after this discovery Lady Delia's maid, Jane Harding, disappears. She is afterwards found to have gone on the stage.

Brett now starts investigations at Raleigh Mansions, and he fixes on two residents there as being likely to have been connected with Lady Delia. These are a Mr. Sydney H. Pyne, who is not at present in residence, and a Mrs. Hilmer, whom he finds to be Pyne's sister.

It had transpired that Pyne had gone to Monte Carlo, and thither Brett goes, and he discovers that though letters are addressed to Pyne at the Hotel du Cercle, he is not known there.

One afternoon Brett goes to a pigeon-shooting match between a Russian count and an Englishman named Albert Mensmore, in which the latter is just beaten, and apparently feels it very much.

In the evening Mensmore is at the gaming table, and after losing heavily goes out into the grounds, followed by Brett, and commences to pace up and down.

CHAPTER IX.

BREAKING THE BANK.

THERE were not many people in this part of the Casino gardens. A few lovemaking couples and a handful of others who preferred the quietude of Nature to the throng of the promenade, made up the occupants of the winding paths that creep along the steep face of the seaward slope.

At last Mensmore halted. There was no one in front, and he turned to look if the terrace was clear behind him. He caught sight of Brett, but did not recognise him, and leant against a low wall, ostensibly to gaze at the sea until the other had passed.

Brett came up to him and cried cheerily: "Hallo, is that you, Mr. Mensmore? Isn't it a lovely night?"

Mensmore, startled at being thus unexpectedly addressed by name, wheeled about, stared at the newcomer, and said, very stiffly: "Yes; but I felt rather seedy in the Casino, so I came here to be alone."

"Of course," answered the barrister. "You look a little out of sorts. Perhaps got a chill, eh? It's dangerous weather here, particularly on these heavenly evenings Come back with me to the hotel, and have a stiff brandy and soda. It will brace you up."

Mensmore flushed a little at this persistence. "I tell you," he growled, "that I only require to be left in peace, and I shall soon recover from my indisposition. I am awfully obliged to you, but ——"

"But you wish me to walk on and mind my own business?"

"Not exactly that, old chap. Please don't think me rude. I am awfully sorry, but I *can't* talk much to-night."

"So I understand. That is why I think it is best for you to have company, even such disagreeable companionship as my own."

"Confound it, man," cried the other, now thoroughly irritated; "tell me which way you are going and I will go the other. Why on earth cannot you take a polite hint, and leave me to myself?"

"It is precisely because I am good at taking a hint that I positively refuse to leave you until you are safely landed at your hotel. Indeed, I may stick to you then for some hours."

"The dickens take you! What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I say."

"If you don't quit this instant I will punch your head for you."

"Ah! You are recovering already. But before you start active exercise take your overcoat off. That revolver in the breast pocket might go off accidentally, you know. Besides, as I shall hit back, I might fetch my knuckles against it, and that would be hardly fair. Otherwise, I can do as much in the punching line as you can, any day."

This reply utterly disconcerted Mensmore.

"Look here," he said, avoiding Brett's steadfast gaze, "what are you talking about? What has it got to do with you, anyhow?"

"Oh, lots. My business principally consists in looking after other people's affairs. Just now it is my definite intention to prevent you from blowing out your brains, or what passes for them."

"Then all I can say is that I wish you were in Jericho. It is your own fault if you get into trouble over this matter. Had you gone about your business I would have waited. As it is——"

It so happened that the guard, having nothing better to do, strolled round the terraces by the same path that Mensmore and Brett had followed. The first sight that met his astonished eyes, when, in the flood of moonlight he

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discovered their identity, was the spectacle of these two springing at each other like a pair of wild cats.

"*Parbleu*," he shouted, "the solitary ones are fighting!"

He ran forward, drawing his short sword ready to stick the weapon into either of the combatants if the majesty of the law in his own person were not at once respected.

In reality, affairs were simple enough. Mensmore had made an ineffectual attempt to draw his revolver, and Brett had pinioned him before he could get his hand up to his pocket. Both men were pretty equally matched, and it was difficult to say how the struggle might have ended had not the sword-brandishing guard appeared on the scene.

Brett, even in this exciting situation, kept his senses; Mensmore, blind with rage and the madness of one who would voluntarily plunge into the Valley of the Shadow, took heed of naught save the effort to rid himself of the restraining clutch.

"Put away your sword. Seize his arms from behind. He is a suicide," shouted the barrister to the gesticulating and shrieking Frenchman.

Fortunately the man grasped his meaning, for Brett was an excellent linguist. He caught Mensmore's arms, put a knee in the small of his back, and doubled him backwards with a force that nearly dislocated his spine. In the same instant Brett secured the revolver which he promptly pocketed.

"It is well," he said to the guard. "Here is a louis. Say nothing, but leave us."

"Monsieur understands that the honour of a French policeman——"

"I understand that if there is any report made of this affair to the authorities you will be dismissed for negligence. Had this lunatic been left to your care he would now have been lying here dead. Do you doubt me?"

The guard hesitated. "Monsieur mentioned a louis," he said, for Brett's finger and thumb had returned the coin to his waistcoat pocket.

This transaction satisfactorily ended, Brett accosted Mensmore, who was awkwardly twisting himself to see if his backbone were all right.

"You are not hurt I hope?"

"It is matterless. Why could you not let me finish the business in my own way?"

"Because the world has some use for a man like you. Because you are a moral coward and require support from a stronger nature. Because I did not want to think of that girl crying her eyes out to-morrow when she read of your death, or heard of it, as she assuredly would have done."

Mensmore, though still furious at Brett's interference, was visibly amazed at this final reference. "What do you know about her?" he said.

"Nothing, save what my eyes tell me."

"They seem to tell you a remarkable lot about my affairs."

"Possibly. Meanwhile I want you to give me your word of honour that you will not make any further attempt on your life for the next seven days."

"My word of honour! Will you accept it?"

"Most certainly."

"You are a queer chap, and no mistake. Very well, I give it. At the same time I cannot help dying of starvation. I lost my last cent to-night at roulette. I am hopelessly involved in debts which I cannot pay. I have no prospects and no friends. You are not doing me a kindness, my dear fellow, in keeping me alive, even for seven days."

"You could have obtained your fare to London from the authorities of the Casino?"

"Hardly. I lost very little at roulette. I am not such a fool. My losses are nearly all in bets over the pigeon-shooting match which I ought to have won. I was backing myself at a game where I was apparently sure to succeed."

"Until you were beaten by a woman's voice."

"Yes, wizard. I am too dazed to wonder at you

He caught Mensmore's arms, put a knee in the small of his back, and doubled him backwards.

sufficiently. Yet I would have lost fifty times for her sake, though it was for her sake that I wanted to win."

"Come, let us smoke. Sit down, and tell me all about it."

They took the nearest seat, lighting cigarettes. The guard, watching them from the shade of a huge palm tree, murmured:

"Holy Virgin, what madmen are these English! They move apart, unknown; they fight; they fraternise; they consume tobacco—all within five minutes." And he lovingly felt for the louis to assure himself that he was not dreaming.

"There is not much to tell," said Mensmore, who had quite recovered his self-control, and was now trying to sum up the man who had so curiously entered his life at the moment when he had decided to do away with it. "I came here, being a poor chap living mostly on his wits, to go in for the pigeon-shooting tournaments. I won several, and was in fair funds. Then I fell in love. The girl is rich, well connected, and all that sort of thing. She is the first good influence that has crossed my life, so I thought that perhaps my luck was now going to turn. I backed myself for all I was worth, and more, to win the championship. If it came off I should have won over £3,000. As it is, I owe £500, which must be paid on Monday. My total assets, after I had settled my hotel bill and sent a cheque to a chum who took some of my bets in his own name, was £20. Now I have nothing. So you will see——"

"Yes," interrupted Brett, "it is a hard case. But death is no settlement. Nobody gets paid and everybody is worried."

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"My dear fellow, my life is in your keeping for seven days. After that, I presume, I take myself in charge again."

The barrister thought deeply before he inquired: "Why did you go to the Casino to-night, then, if you do not patronise the tables as a rule?"

The other coloured somewhat and laughed sarcastically. "Just a final bit of folly. I dreamt that my luck had turned."

"Dreamt?"

"Yes, last night. Three times did I imagine that I was playing roulette, and that after a certain number—whether thirteen or twenty-three, I was uncertain—turned up, there was a run of seventeen on the red. The funny thing is that I had an impression that the number was twenty-three, but with a doubt that it might be thirteen. I remember, during a sub-conscious state in the third dream, resolving to listen and look more carefully to discover the exact number. But again things got blurred. The only clear point was that the run of seventeen on the red commenced at once."

"Well?"

"Well. I took my last twenty, went to the Casino, became a bit impatient when neither number turned up for quite a while, and then when thirteen appeared I backed the red. But four times it was the black that won."

"So I saw."

"Have you been keeping guard over me?"

"Yes in a sort of a way."

"You *are* a queer chap. I can't help saying that I am obliged to you. But it won't do any good. I am absolutely dead broke."

"Now listen to me. I will pay your fare back to London and give you something to live on until I return a week hence. Then you must come and see me, and I will help you into some sort of situation. But you must once and for all abandon this suicidal notion."

"What about my debts?"

"Confound your debts. Tell people to wait until you are able to pay them."

"And—and the girl?"

"If she is worth having she will give you a chance of making a living sufficient to enable you to marry her. She is of age, I suppose, and can marry anyone she likes."

Mensmore puffed his cigarette in silence for fully a minute. Then he said:

"You are a very decent sort, Mr.——"

"Brett—Reginald Brett is my name."

"Well, Mr. Brett, you propose to hand me £10 for my railway fare, and, say, £5 for my existence, until we meet again in London, in exchange for which you purchase the rights in my life indefinitely, accidents and reasonable wear and tear excepted."

"Exactly!"

"Make it £20, with a fiver down, and I accept."

"Why the stipulation?"

"I want to back my dream. The number is twenty-three, as it evidently was not thirteen. I want to see that thing through. I will put a fiver on the red after twenty-three turns up, and if I lose I shall be quite satisfied."

"What if I refuse?"

"Then I don't care a bit what happens for the next seven days. After that, *au revoir*, should we chance to meet across the divide. Please make up your mind quickly, as that run on the red may come and go whilst we are sitting here."

Brett opened his pocket-book. "Here," he said with a smile, "I will give you a ten-pound note. You will reach the maximum more quickly if you are right."

Mensmore's face lit up with excitement. "By Jove, you are a brick," he said. "So you really trust me?"

"Yes."

"Then give me back my revolver."

Without a word Brett handed him the weapon. Mensmore stood up and threw it far out into the deep waters of the Mediterranean.

"Come," he cried; "come with me to the Casino. You will see something. This is not my own luck; it is borrowed. Come, quick!"

They raced off, Brett himself being more fired with the zest of the thing than he cared to admit. Within the Casino all the tables were now crowded, but Mensmore hurried to the centre one.

"It was here that I played in my dream," he whispered, "soon after I came to it."

He edged through the onlookers, closely followed by Brett. Neither cared for the scowls and injured looks cast at them by the people whom they forced out of the way.

The Italian, the winner of half-an-hour ago, had come back like a moth to the candle. Now he was getting his wings singed. At last, with a groan, he hastily rose, but as a final effort flung the maximum, 6,000 francs, on the black.

The disc whirled round, the ball rested in one of the little squares, and the croupier's monotonous words came:

"*Vingt-trois, passe, rouge gagne!*"

Out bounced the Italian, and Mensmore seized his chair, turning to Brett with white face as he murmured:

"You hear! Twenty-three!"

He lovingly felt for the louis to assure himself he was not dreaming.

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The barrister nodded, and placed his hands on Mensmore's shoulders as though to steady him.

Mensmore staked his £10 note on the red. It became £20, then £40. Another whirl and it was £80! a fourth made it £160.

Mensmore was now so agitated that the table and the players swam before his eyes. But Brett, under the stress of circumstances, had the gift of remaining preternaturally cool.

At the fifth coup the sum to Mensmore's credit was £320. He would have left it all on the table had not Brett withdrawn £80 in notes, as the maximum is £240.

When Mensmore won the sixth and seventh coups a buzz of animated interest passed around the board. People began to note the run on the red together with the fact that a man was staking the maximum each time. Even the croupier cast a fleeting glance at the newcomer, as for the fourth time his long rake pushed across the table the little printed slip which sets forth that the Casino owes the bearer 6,000 francs.

Thenceforth Mensmore sat in a state of stupor more pronounced now that he was playing and awake than when he dreamt he was playing.

Each time he mechanically pushed forth a maximum slip and received back two, whilst the eager onlookers now burst into cries of wonder that brought others running from all parts of the room.

Each time he mechanically pushed forward a maximum slip.

But Brett did not lose count.

When the red had turned up seventeen times, and the amount to Mensmore's credit was £3,200, he shook the latter violently as he was about to shove forward another maximum, and of his own volition, placed the little slip on the black.

"*Douze, impasse noire gagne!*" sang out the croupier, and Brett hissed into Mensmore's ear:

"Get up at once."

His strangely-made acquaintance obeyed, gathered up his slips and notes, fastened them securely in an inner pocket, and the pair quitted the Casino amidst extravagant protestations of goodwill and friendship from all the voluble foreigners present.

It was some time before the roulette tables began their orderly round again, for Mensmore's sensational performance was the equivalent to the proceeding at *trente et quarante*, familiarly known as "breaking the bank."

In the latter game there is the high limit of 300,000f., which, if once won, causes that particular table to cease play for the day.

In roulette, on the other hand, it is a mere question of endurance.

The highest recorded run is twenty-three on the black, but a run of seventeen on the red is sufficiently remarkable to keep Monte Carlo in talk for a week.

Albert Mensmore certainly could not complain that the events of that particular evening were dull. For one hour at least he lived in true *fin de siècle* style, having stepped back from the porch of death with dishonour, to the possession of a sum more than sufficient for his reasonable requirements.

The pace was rapid and almost fatal.

CHAPTER X.

SOME GOOD RESOLUTIONS.

ONCE safe in the seclusion of Brett's sitting-room his companion almost collapsed. The strain had been a severe one, and now he had to pay the penalty by way of reaction.

The barrister forced him to swallow a stiff brandy and soda, and then wished him to retire to rest, but the other protested with some show of returning animation.

"Let me talk, for goodness' sake," he cried. "I cannot be alone. You have seen me through a lot of trouble tonight. Stick to me for another hour, there's a good fellow."

"With pleasure. Perhaps it is the best thing you can do, after all. Let us see how much you have won."

Brett made a calculation on a sheet of paper and said: "Exclusive of the original stake of £10 you ought to have £3,190."

Mensmore pulled out of his pocket the crumpled up bundle of notes and bills. Brett's £10 note was amongst them, and he tossed it across the table with a smile.

"There's your capital. I will see if the total is all right before we go shares."

Reggie nodded, and Mensmore began to jot down the items of his valuable package. He bothered with the figures for some time but could not get them right. Finally he tossed everything over to Brett, saying:

"No matter how I count, I can't get this calculation straight. Seventeen coups, beginning with £10, work out at £3,190 right enough. But in this lot there is £3,430, and they don't pay twice at the Casino as a rule."

The barrister thought for a moment, and then laughed heartily. "I remember now," he said, "I kept careful count of the series of seventeen, and then, on my own account, as you were too dazed to notice anything, I put a maximum on the black. Your dream turned up trumps, as the series stopped and black won. Hence the odd £240."

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"Then that is yours," said the other gravely. "I will take £1,190 to square all my debts, and we go shares in the balance, a thousand each, if you think that fair. If not I will gladly hand over the lot, after paying my debts I mean."

Mensmore's seriousness impressed the barrister more than any other incident of that dramatic evening.

"You forget," he replied, "that I told you I had money in plenty for my own needs. You must keep every farthing except my own £10, which you do not now need. No. Please do not argue. I will consent to no other course. This turn of Fortune's wheel should provide you with sufficient capital to branch out earnestly in your career, whatever it be. I will ask my interest in different manner."

"I can never repay you, in gratitude at any rate. And there is another who will be thankful to you when she knows. Ask anything you like. Make any stipulation you please. I agree to it."

"It is a bargain. Sign this."

Brett took a sheet of notepaper, bearing the crest of the Hotel du Cercle, dated it, and wrote:—

"I promise that, for the space of twelve months, I will not make a bet of any sort, nor gamble at any game of chance."

When Mensmore read the document his face fell a little. "Won't you except pigeon-shooting?" he said. "I am sure to beat that Russian next time."

"I can allow no exceptions."

"But why limit me for twelve months?"

"Because if in that time you do not get sense enough to stop risking your happiness, even your life, upon the turn of a card or the flight of a bird, the sooner thereafter you shoot yourself the less trouble you will bring upon those connected with you."

"You are a rum chap," murmured Mensmore, "and you put matters pretty straight, too. However, here goes. You don't bar me from entering for sweepstakes."

He signed the paper, and tossed it over to Brett, whilst the latter did not comment upon the limitation to his intentions imposed by Mensmore's final sentence. The man undoubtedly was a good shot, and during his residence in the Riviera he might pick up some valuable prizes.

"And now," said Brett, "may I ask as a friend to what use you intend to put your newly-found wealth?"

"Oh, that is simple enough. I have to pay £500 which I lost in bets over that beastly unlucky match. Then I have a splendid 'spec,' into which I will now be able to place about £2,000—a thing which I have good reason to believe will bring me in at least ten thou' within the year, and there is over a thousand pounds to go on with. And all thanks to you."

"Never mind thanking me. I am only too glad to have taken such a part in the affair. I will never forget this night as long as I live."

"Nor I. Just think of it. I might be lying in the gardens now, or in some mortuary, with half my head blown off."

"Tell me," said Brett, between the contemplative puffs of a cigar, "what induced you to think of suicide?"

"It was a combination of circumstances," replied the other. "You must understand that I was somewhat worried about financial and family matters when I came to Monte Carlo. It was not to gamble, in a sense, that I stopped here. I have loafed about the world a good deal, but I may honestly say that I never made a fool of myself at cards or backing horses. At most kinds of sport I am fairly proficient, and in pigeon-shooting, which goes on here so extensively, I am undoubtedly an expert. For instance, all this season I have kept myself in funds simply by means of these competitions."

Brett nodded approvingly.

"Well, in the midst of my minor troubles, I must needs go and fall over head and ears in love—a regular bad case. She is the first woman I ever spoke two civil words to. We met at a picnic along the Corniche Road, and she sat upon me so severely that I commenced to defend myself by showing that I was not such a surly brute as I looked. By Jove, in a week we were engaged."

The barrister indulged in a judicial frown.

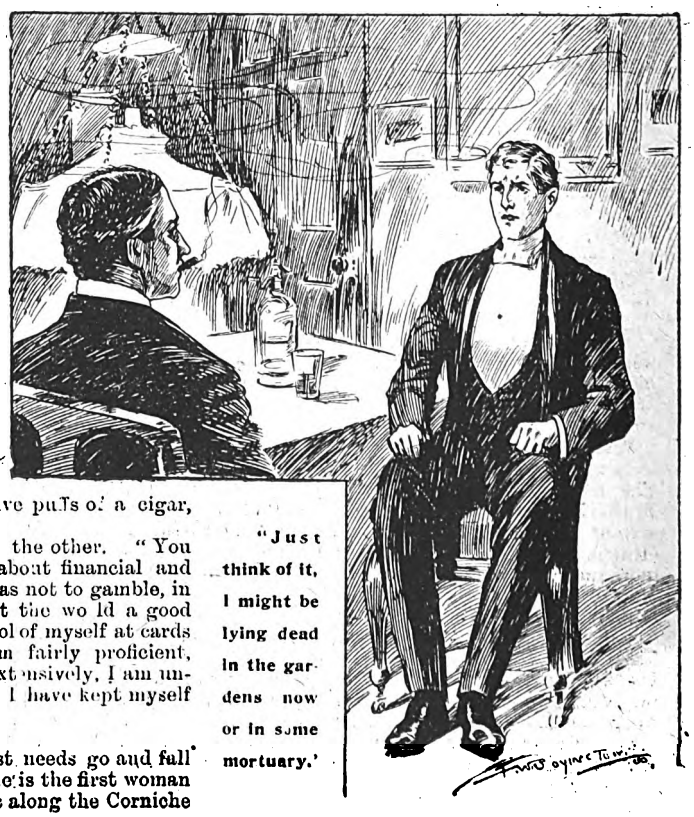
"No. It's none of your silly, sentimental affairs in which people part and meet months afterwards with polite inquiries after each other's health. I am not made that way; neither is Phil—Phyllis is her name, you know. This is for life. I am just bound up in her, and she would go through fire and water for me. But she is rich, the only daughter of a Midland ironmaster with tons of money. Her people are awfully nice, and I think they approve of me, though they have no idea that Phil and I are engaged."

He paused to gulp down a strong decoction of brandy and soda. The difficult part of his story was coming.

"You can quite believe," he continued, "that I did not want to ask her father, Sir William Browne—he was knighted by the Queen for his distinguished municipal services—to give his daughter to a chap who hadn't a cent. He supposes I am fairly well off, living as I do, and I can't bear acting under false pretences. I hate it like poison, though in this world a man often has to do what he doesn't like. However, this time I determined to act straight and above board. It was a very odd fact, but I just wanted £3,000 to enable me to make a move which, as I tell you, ought to result in a very fair sum of money, sufficient, at any rate, to render it a reasonable proposition for Phil and I to get married."

Brett was an appreciative listener. These love stories of real life are often so much more dramatic than the fictions of the novel or the stage.

"The opportunity came, to my mind, in this big tournament. I had no difficulty in getting odds of six or seven to one to far more than I was able to pay if I lost. Phil came into the scheme with me—she knows all about me, you



"Just think of it, I might be lying dead in the gardens now or in some mortuary.'

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know—and we both regarded it as a certainty. Then the collapse came. She wanted to get the money from her mother to enable me to pay up, but I would not hear of it. I pretended that I could raise the wind some other way. The fact is I was wild with myself and with my luck generally. Then there was the disgrace of failing to settle on Monday, combined with the general excitement of that dream and a fearfully disturbed night. To make a long story short, I thought the best thing to do was to try a final plunge, and if it failed, to quit. I even took steps to make Phil believe I was a bad lot, so that she might not fret too much after me."

Mensmore's voice was a little unsteady in this last sentence. The barrister tried to cheer him by a little bit of raillery:

"I hope you have not succeeded too well?" he laughed.

"Oh, it is all right now. I mean that I left her some papers which would bring things to her knowledge that, unexplained by me, would give anyone a completely false impression."

The subject was evidently a painful one so Brett did not pursue it.

"About this speculation of yours," he said. "Are you sure it's all right and that you will not lose your money?"

"It is as certain as any business can be. It is a matter I thoroughly understand, but I will tell you all about it. If you will pardon me a moment I will bring you the papers, as I should like to have your advice, and it is early yet. You don't want to go to bed, I suppose?"

"Not for hours."

Mensmore rose, but before he reached the door a gentle tap heralded the appearance of a hall-porter.

"There is a letter for the gentleman. Monsieur is not in his room. He is reported to be here, so I bring it."

Mensmore took the note, read it with a smile and a growing flush, and handed it to the barrister, saying: "Under the circumstances I think you ought to see this. Isn't she a brick?"

The tiny missive ran:

DEAREST ONE,—You must forgive me, but we are both so miserable about that wretched money that I told mother everything. She likes you, and though she gave me a blowing-up, she has promised to give me £500 to-morrow. We can never thank her sufficiently. Do come round and see me for a minute. I will be in the verandah until eleven.—Ever yours, PHYLLIS.

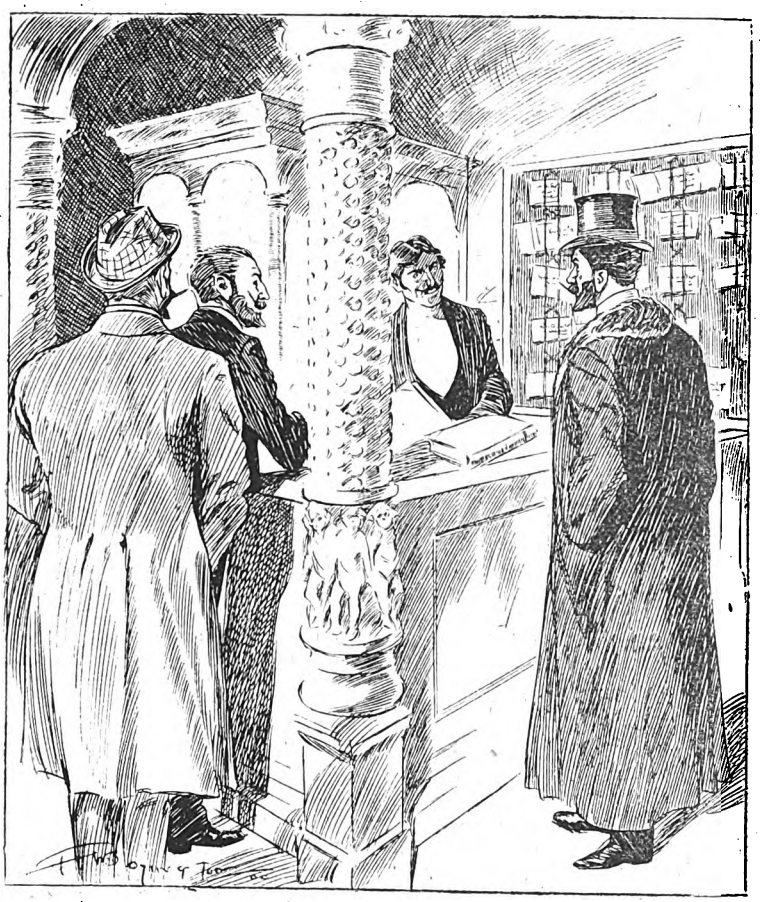
Reggie returned the note. "Luck! you're the luckiest fellow in the South of France. Why, here's the mother plotting with the daughter on your behalf. Sir William hasn't the ghost of a chance. Off you go to that blessed verandah."

When Mensmore had quitted the hotel Brett descended to the bureau to take up the threads of his neglected quest. The letter to Sydney H. Pyne was still unclaimed, and Brett thought he was justified in examining it. On the reverse of the envelope was the embossed stamp of an electric lighting company, so the contents were nothing more important than a bill.

An hour later Mensmore joined him in the billiard-room, radiant and excited:

"Great news," he said. "I squared everything with Lady Browne. Told her I was only chaffing Phil about the five hundred, because she spoilt my aim by shrieking out. Sir William has chartered a steam yacht to go for a three weeks' cruise along the Gulf of Genoa and the Italian coast. They have put him up to ask me in the morning to join the party. Great Scott! what a night I'm having!"

They parted soon after, and next morning Brett was informed that his friend had gone out early, leaving word that he had been summoned to breakfast at the Grand Hotel, where Sir William Browne was staying.



Other men came and asked for Pyne—sharp-featured men with imperials and long moustaches.

During the afternoon Mensmore came to him like a whirlwind. "We're off to-day," he said. "By the way, where shall I find you in London?"

Brett gave him his address, and Mensmore, handing him a card, said, "My permanent address is given here, the Orleans Club, St. James's. But I will look you up first. I shall be in town early in March. And you?"

"Oh, I shall be home much sooner. Good-bye, and don't let your good luck spoil you."

"No fear! Wait until you know Phyllis. She would keep any fellow all right once he got his chance, as I have done. Good-bye, and—and—God bless you!"

During the next three days the barrister devoted himself sedulously to the search for Pyne. He inquired in every possible and impossible place, but the man had utterly vanished.

Nor did he come to claim his letter at the Hotel du Cercle. As a matter of fact, it remained stuck on the baize-covered board until it was covered with dust, and the clerk at the bureau had grown weary of watching people who scrutinised the receptacle for their correspondence.

Others came and asked for Pyne—sharp-featured men with imperials and long moustaches—the interest taken in the man was great, but unrequited. He never appeared.

At last the season ended, the hotel was closed, and the mysterious letter was shot into the dustbin.

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SHORT STORIES ABOUT PEOPLE.

We devote, every week, two pages of *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "Pirate Gold," by J. R. Hutchinson, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case the source *must* be stated. The prize of One Guinea offered for the best Storyette in this competition has been won this week by Mr. R. Jenkins, Little Boys' Press, South Darenth, Kent. Attempts this week must deal with Stories about ANY SUBJECT, and must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, January 14th. Post-cards only, please.

Courting.

AT a certain school, during a lesson in parsing, the sentence, "Man courting in capacity of bliss," was given, and the word "courting" came to a little girl, aged thirteen, to parse.

She commenced hesitatingly, but got on very well until she had to say what it agreed with. There she stopped short. But as the teacher said:

"Come, what does courting agree w th?"

Janet blushed, and held down her head.

"Janet, don't you know what courting agrees with?"

"Ye-ye-yes, ma'am."

"Well, Janet, why don't you tell me?"

Blushing still more, and stammering, Janet at last blurted out:

"It agrees with all the girls, ma'am."

R. J.

Must Prepare for Tourists.

A CERTAIN village, whose ponds and lakes had not been frozen over for many years, was recently visited by a very sharp and severe frost which lasted several weeks.

All the water in the district was thickly covered with ice, which afforded a splendid opportunity for skating. Visitors from all the country round flocked to this spot attracted by the prospect of some good sport.

The majority of them came unprovided with skates, and consequently the sudden demand at the village store was enormous. At last, the store-keeper, who had never before heard of skates, tired of having to turn away intending purchasers, remarked to his wife:

"Mary, we'll have to get in a stock of these 'ere skates, for, if the demand is so great now, what will it be in the summer when the tourists come?"

A. R. H.

"I'll Wrestle wi' It."

A WELL-KNOWN Dean was presiding once at a dinner given to a number of the agriculturists in his parish, among whom were a number with unlimited capacity for the good things of the table.

The Dean had a quarter of a lamb set before him to carve, which he proceeded to do by cutting off the shoulder and placing it on a plate at his left hand.

A farm labourer sitting next to the Dean quietly surveyed the proceedings with a widely-opened mouth and dilated inc edulous eyes.

At last the man pulled closer, and with loud guffaw looked into the Dean's face, saying:

"Well, maister, it's a biggish bit, but I'll wrestle wi' it."

J. G. B.

Sleeping in Church.

SLEEPING in church is sometimes severely dealt with by old-fashioned ministers, but we doubt if any form of rebuke can equal in severity that of an Indian chaplain.

During the sermon his congregation had peacefully slumbered, but they did not know what was before them, for at its close the preacher sternly remarked:

"Brethren, as this sermon has caused me considerable labour to compose, and as scarcely anyone has remained awake to listen to it, I shall read it again!"

And he did.

A. R. S.

Caught in the Act.

ONE afternoon, when a gale of wind was raging, a gentleman in feeble health was struggling to reach his home, aided by his wife.

Just as they reached the corner of a street a huge chimney-pot was torn from the roof of a house by the wind, and dashed to the ground just in front of the gentleman and his wife.

"Good gracious!" cried the gentleman, "that was a narrow escape for us."

The two stopped for a moment to examine the chimney-pot—more dangerous in a high wind than a bombshell; but just as they were scrutinising it, a window near by was opened, a female head was thrust out, and in a shrill voice she shouted:

"You needn't think you're going to carry that off, because it belongs to my house."

R. A.

Why He Was Armed.

AN English resident in Ladysmith, who acknowledged a belief in fatalism, had occasion to take a journey on foot outside the town soon after it was relieved, and to prepare himself for the journey he strapped his rifle to his back.

A friend finding him thus armed when setting out on the journey, expressed surprise, and added:

"I thought you were of opinion that you would have to die when your turn came in spite of all you could do to prevent it. Why, then, carry a rifle?"

"Well, you see, I may meet an armed Boer," was the reply.

"But he will kill you if it is so ordained," urged the other.

"Yes, but don't you see," said the traveller drily, "it may be the Boer's turn to die!"

W. C.

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The Parson and the Billygoat.

A FEW years ago an old woman from Derbyshire paid a visit to some friends living at a distance, who on the Sunday she was staying with them persuaded her to accompany them to church.

Taking her seat in the gallery a distance from the pulpit, she appeared to listen very attentively to the sermon, when she suddenly began to weep.

At the close of the sermon the minister sent for her into the vestry.

"Now, my good woman, I saw you weeping. May I ask what part of my sermon so affected you?"

The old woman said:

"It wer none o' the sarmon that affected me, for I couldn't hear a word you said, but seeing thy jaws go wag wag, wag, and thy beard wobbling about, it made me think o' my auld billy goat as deid a fornit come Monday."

The interview terminated abruptly. C. S.

The Show was Not Postponed.

As most of our readers will remember, the Royal Agricultural Society's show was held at York during the past summer, the Prince of Wales, as President of the Society, attending.

As a whole, the inhabitants of the district were gratified by the Society's choice of a show-ground, but that there were exceptions, the following little incident proves:

Somebody suddenly discovered that the date of the Royal show clashed with that of another very important event—the village feast, to wit.

The matter was discussed with some warmth in the particular village referred to, and one aged inhabitant even went so far as to move a resolution on the subject.

"I moves," he remarked, "as this meetin' o' intelligent villagers protests agin this 'ere sneakin' of oor dates, an' that a letter be wrote to His R'yal 'Ighness axin' 'im to put off his show till oor feast's ower!"

J. R. T.

He Also Ran.

THE proprietor of a Birmingham restaurant advertised for a cook during the racing season.

The first to apply for the berth appeared to be very suitable. But before engaging him the restaurant keeper inquired if he could give him a tip for the "Derby."

The cook's eyes brightened.

He whispered a "dead cert," and mentioned that he had five shillings on the horse himself.

That was enough.

The proprietor gave him a lecture on the evils of betting, and showed him the door. As he went out he saw another man about to enter.

"Are you going to apply for the job?" he asked. "Well, if you're asked if you know anything about racing, say you can't tell a 'Derby' winner from a coster's donkey."

The man took the advice, was engaged, and commenced his duties.

Presently the proprietor rushed up to the speaking-tube, and yelled to the new cook:

"Calf's head one."

Instantly the reply came back:

"Did he, by George? Who came in second and third?"

L. J. W.

YOUR HEAD AND SHOULDERS ONLY.

IF you have a relative who has passed away either at home in peace or abroad in war, send his photograph—which you probably cherish—and we will enlarge it to a beautiful India ink and crayon portrait, 15in. by 12in., mounted on plate sunk mount 24in. by 19in.

Relatives of soldiers at the front may obtain one of these enlargements for 6s.

Other photographs will be enlarged for 7s.

You will certainly get a genuine bargain by availing yourself of this offer. The enlargements can be made from any photograph, large or small, tin-types, or any kind of glass picture, provided the print is legible. All the enlargements are of the head and shoulders only.

What to do.

Write your name and address plainly in ink on a slip of paper, also on the back of the portrait you are sending us. Get a postal order for 7s. (if the photograph be that of a soldier or sailor get a 6s. postal order). Place all of these in an envelope, or make a securely packed parcel of them and address it to the PORTRAIT EDITOR, *Pearson's Weekly*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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MRS. GUM'S ONE FAILING.

I DO not for a minute say that Mrs. Gum, my landlady, has not got good qualities, for she has a charm of manner that is pretty to behold, and her cooking leaves very little to be desired.

But what I do think is that Mrs. Gum might refrain from raking up my past history. She says that I bring back recollections of long ago to her mind; and then she gives me the benefit of them.

Just because Mrs. Gum happened at one period of her life to be my nurse, she believes that the greatest favour she can bestow upon me is to regale me with various anecdotes respecting my early doings, capabilities and attractions.

She will put the beer on the table with the remark that I was brought up on the bottle; or the butter-dish would be put in its place with the giddy information that I always would insist upon playing in the coalbox.

Now highly exciting as these infantile titbits may be at first they soon begin to pall upon one; and I believe that a prolonged course would, in the end, drive one to drink and crime.

Matters reached a climax one day when two lady friends of mine came to take tea with me.

One of the lady friends was young and the other was her aunt.

I had been thinking about this little tea party for some time, for Norah had promised to persuade her aunt to come.

Thinking to give Norah's aunt a treat I had spent a great deal of time finding out from Norah the especial kind of delicacy she liked to assimilate at tea.

After much discussion, which occupied several hours a day for a week beforehand, we decided on a small cup of tea with balanced bread and butter—that is to say a piece of bread and butter balanced on the saucer of the aforesaid cup—for Norah's aunt. Norah said her aunt never could balance her cup and pay any attention to anything else; so we two decided to have strawberries and cream.

The eventful day arrived, my small sitting-room had been purged of tobacco smoke, and looked quite gay and festive with flowers, whilst I was striding quickly up and down the room calmly awaiting my visitors.

Norah's aunt's name was Mrs. Bray, and Mrs. Gum dropped her a curtsy. I felt at the time that I ought to follow Mrs. Gum's example, but I am glad now I didn't.

To tell the truth I felt like dropping on the floor altogether, but, as I said, I'm glad I didn't.

Now everything went on swimmingly until Mrs. Gum began to purr.

I must have seemed very happy and I suppose Mrs. Gum had noticed the fact.

Tears began to come into Mrs. Gum's eyes and I knew that that was a sure sign that she was going to purr.

At first I could hear her purring to herself, "What a dear, fat baby he was, bless him. Brought up on the bottle, too," and so on and so on until Mrs. Gum, carried away by her emotions, uttered aloud the appalling remark: "Eh, but you was always fond of the girls Master Harry, bless your heart!"

Mrs. Bray dropped the cup of tea Mrs. Gum had given to her a couple of minutes before, and I sat upon mine, which I had put down whilst I handed some strawberries to Norah.

Of course I felt I ought to explain and that only made Norah laugh the more.

I don't know how that tea-party finished. I have not the slightest recollection of anything beyond the fact that after my visitors had gone I buried my head in the cushions upon the sofa and kicked for half-an-hour.

The worst of it was that I could not make Mrs. Gum see the enormity of her offence; and the only way I saw of weaning Mrs. Gum from her vice was to set about giving her other things to think of.

So I thereupon determined to give Mrs. Gum food for reflection in the shape of chemistry.

I thought it might do her good, cultivate her intellect, and help her mind from relapsing into ancient history.

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It was with these good intentions that I one day made the remark in most solemn tones:—

"Mrs. Gum, perhaps you are not aware that this water is an oxide of hydrogen!"

Mrs. Gum dropped a fork in her alarm and stared at the water jug I held.

"Well, sir," she said, "you do surprise me. I only drawed it fresh this morning and put it in the filter, sir, I do assure you."

I put the jug down and she immediately clutched it and held it up to the light.

"You don't understand me, Mrs. Gum. I am not finding fault with the water; but what I wished to tell you was that water is composed of oxygen and hydrogen. That, Mrs. Gum," I continued "is a fact known to all the leading scientists of the day."

"Lor', sir, you don't say so! Well, there's no telling what we eat and drink now-a-days. I suppose it's them water companies as has done it, sir."

"Done what, Mrs. Gum?" I asked.

"Put them things in what you said, sir, for I never heard tell of 'em being in afore."

"I am afraid, Mrs. Gum, that you still misunderstand me. Hydrogen and oxygen are gases, and these gases are in that water there on the table, in a state of combination. Now, do I make myself clear?"

"Well, I never heard the like, sir. I've heard of 'em putting water in the gas to make it burn proper, but as for 'em putting gas in water, it do beat all. Isn't it bad for the innards, sir?"

"You have not grasped it yet, Mrs. Gum," I replied. "There are other gases than coal gas, and the two I have named unite to form water. When either of them, Mrs. Gum, burns in an atmosphere of the other, water is the result. Now, do you understand me?"

Mrs. Gum looked at me and began to smile.

"It's one of your jokes, sir. You always was one for jokes."

I frowned; my whole system revolted at the idea. I looked sternly at Mrs. Gum and said quietly yet distinctly:

"Mrs. Gum, you have made a great mistake. Levity and chemistry are antipodal."

"Oh! it is some of your chemicals is it, sir?" said Mrs. Gum with a sudden look of intelligence.

"What I told you, Mrs. Gum, was a fact discovered by Cavendish and interpreted by Lavoisier, both of whom were eminent chemists."

"I know of a tobacco called Cavendish, it's what my poor husband used to smoke. What was the other gentleman's name, sir?"

"Lavoisier, a Frenchman," I replied.

"I'd a deal rather have English ones myself, sir, as you never knows what them furriners puts in their pills. Not as that I troubles 'em much, sir, never being much poorly and a drop of senna tea last thing sets me as right as never was."

"We are getting farther from the point, Mrs. Gum," said I, returning once more to the attack in the interests of science, "I don't think you quite understand yet that that water on the table——"

"Shall I bring you a bottle of beer, sir, and throw the water away?" interrupted Mrs. Gum. It must have been the heavy rain we have had as has done it."

I looked at Mrs. Gum, sighed and said:

"Bring two bottles of beer Mrs. Gum, I feel I need two at least."

That was my first and last attempt to cultivate Mrs. Gum's mind.

It took me a quarter of an hour explaining to the plumber I found at work next day ripping up sundry boards and pipes, that there *was* no escape of gas, and that I had never said the gas *was* escaping into the water.

Although I paid that plumber half-a-crown for loss of time, I still think he looks upon me as a kind of confirmed idiot. I told Norah that I had been trying to lead Mrs. Gum into the paths of rectitude; but she only laughed at me and said that Mrs. Gum was a dear old soul and that I was a silly fellow.

I tried to balance up that statement but couldn't; nor could I understand why Norah and Mrs. Gum kissed each other so much whenever they met.

I often used to wish that Norah would feel what I felt when Mrs. Gum besmirched my fair name with past history.

Happy was the day when that wish was fulfilled.

I remember the day well by reason of an appointment I had that I felt I must keep. I was to be married.

Norah was there and so was Mrs. Gum.

As I went up the aisle I heard Mrs. Gum distinctly remark "Brought up on the bottle he was, bless his little heart!"

But it was when all was over and we were about to set off for the station that Mrs. Gum really became most original.

"It is not you I'll be dandling on my knee next Mister Harry, lor' bless both of you," said Mrs. Gum.

Then we drove off and the last glimpse I had that day of Mrs. Gum showed her to me with tears streaming down her dear old face, but happy and smiling.

W. ST. G. DRENNAN.

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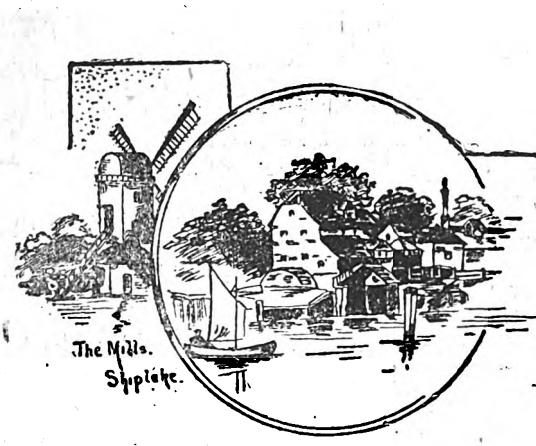

A BONE OF CONTENTION.

THE first baby is not generally supposed to be a bone of contention. On the contrary it is, as a rule, considered a bond of union between its parents. Strange, however, to say, this was not the case with Captain Grant, of the 15th Hussars, and his wife. Indeed it nearly caused an estrangement, and it certainly had to answer for the only quarrel they ever had.

There is no doubt that when the infant first made its appearance, Jack Grant was as fond and proud a father as could be found in the United Kingdom.

He tried to see the numerous likenesses to various relatives which his wife discovered in their son; he persuaded himself he felt highly flattered when she declared she saw in the somewhat plain infant a strong look of himself; and finally wound himself up to such a pitch of enthusiasm, he actually made an awkward attempt to hold the child, and even impressed a fatherly kiss on its small, mottled, red face.

This was a very happy state of affairs so long as it lasted, but unfortunately a change was soon to be observed.

Captain Grant began to wish his wife could find some other subject on which to exercise her conversational powers than "the baby;" he also commenced to wonder if it were necessary to talk to the child in the senseless and extremely odd style which she and the nurse invariably used when they addressed it.

At last he was obliged to confess to himself that unnatural as it seemed, he occasionally found his boy, in spite of his numerous perfections, a decided bore.

"You see," he confided to his chum, Jim Reeves, "a fellow gets so awfully sick of hearing nothing but agoo-and agoo-and-a-bubble-bubble-bubble, which is the way my wife and the nurse always speak to the poor little brat. I can't get the idiotic rubbish out of my head; and upon my word, when some of the fellows the other day at the mess were talking of the new regulations that have just come out, and asked me what I thought of them, I was as near as possible making a consummate ass of myself before them all, by answering; 'Agoo-and agoo-and-a-bubble-bubble-bubble.' I assure you I was within an ace of doing so. If I could have a little sensible conversation with my wife when the child had been put to bed, it would not be so bad, but sleeping or waking 'the baby' occupies all the attention. I am supposed to be violently excited to hear of the 'heavenly, sweet smile' that came over the brat's face when he saw his bottle being brought to him, or that he managed to crawl three more inches on the ground, or something else that appears to me equally uninteresting. It's really awfully rough on a fellow."

"Rather trying," remarked his friend sympathetically.

"Trying," repeated Jack. "That is not the word for it. I declare it makes me so irritable, I sometimes feel inclined to swear at them all round, the baby included."

"Come," answered Jim, reprovingly, "I call that unfair. What! swear at a helpless infant, whose only method of retort and strongest language for some time to come will be 'a-goo' and 'a-bubble.' That is fighting upon unequal terms with a vengeance."

"Oh, if you are going to chaff me I'll shut up," replied Jack testily, "I only wish you were bothered by the same sort of thing, and then I don't think you would find it so amusing," saying which he turned on his heel and walked away in a huff.

It was in this unsatisfactory frame of mind regarding his first-born, that Jack proceeded to wend his way home one cold winter's afternoon a short time after Christmas. He had had a hard day's work, and was looking forward with a feeling of relief to a chat with his wife and a cigar before dinner. True his mind was somewhat disturbed by the thought that it was possible the *tête-à-tête* he anticipated might be broken into by the presence of a third party. But he resolutely shook off this gloomy foreboding, and walked on briskly towards his destination.

On arriving there and hearing his wife's voice somewhere overhead, he called out to her he was home, and was going to the smoking-room, where he would be glad of her company until it was time to dress for dinner.

"Very well, dear," she answered brightly, "we'll come in a minute."

"We!" said Jack to himself, "who else is she bringing? Surely it can't be the child. She can never mean to turn this room, as well as every other in the house, into a nursery. Hang it all, that would really be unbearable."

If, however, he had any doubts on the subject, they were soon to be dispelled, for he had hardly lit his cigar before his wife made her appearance with the baby in her arms.

"Well," thought Jack, resigned, "I suppose there is nothing for it but to grin and bear it."

"Now, Jack, my dearest," exclaimed his wife gushingly. "I have such a piece of news for you. You will never guess what it is. It is something almost too delightful for words."

"I also have something to tell you," broke in Jack, as his wife paused to take breath, for he felt instinctively

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that the important news his wife referred to had something to do with his off-spring, and he knew that once that all-absorbing subject was started all other topics of conversation would be inevitably banished for the time being. "I also have something to tell you. I met Chalmers to-day; he is staying here for a few days with his cousin, so I asked him to come and dine with us some time next week, and I think we might invite one or two people to meet him. Now, on what day do you think we had better ask him, and who else shall we have?"

"I will think about it in a minute," answered his little wife eagerly, "but I must tell you my news first. Fancy! Baby is getting a tooth, and he is only just four months old!"

"That's capital," said Jack, in a voice intended to express unlimited delight. "There is no doubt that the little fellow is very well on for his age. I should think now he will be trotting about all over the place before we know where we are."

"I don't think I should feel I was doing my duty by him if I allowed him to do such a thing, even if he could," replied his wife severely. "I don't know if you are particularly anxious to see your child grow up bandy legged. I can't say I am."

"Ah, yes, I forgot he is rather weak in the legs at present," remarked Jack in a crestfallen voice. "But, May," he continued, more cheerfully, feeling he had done his duty bravely, and nothing more could be expected of him for the present, "what about having Chalmers?"

"Let me see," said May, thoughtfully. Then appealing to the baby, "What does 'oo think, my pretty? Agoo-and-agoo-and-a-bubble-bubble——"

"Come," said Jack, a little impatiently, "try to arrange something, as Chalmers is only here for a few days, and I want you to write to him to-night."

"Must we tink, my sweet?" continued May, apparently oblivious of everything but the existence of her son, and only half-hearing her husband's last remark. "Must we tink, my beauty? Well, then, agoo-and-agoo-and-a-bub——"

"For Heaven's sake try for one moment to attend to what I am saying," said Jack sharply. "I won't trouble you long, and then you will be at liberty to return to your very intellectual conversation with the child."

This time, May took in what her husband said, but being annoyed at the way he had spoken she determinedly took no notice of his request, but, staring absently into the fire, went on talking to her baby.

"Yes, my own own, does your pretty papa want——"

"Confound it!" exclaimed poor, tired Jack angrily, "do you want to drive me mad with your infernal nonsense? I have never yet been considered pretty, nor have I any wish to be called so at this time of my life. Can't you find a more suitable adjective to apply to me than that."

"Indeed I can," returned May, losing her temper in her turn, "cross, ill-tempered, rude, unnatural, cruel, are all the words which may be applied to you in your present state of mind."

"Well, I am sure I am not surprised," retorted Jack, "the only wonder is I don't go off my head with hearing the flow of absurd nonsense that seems to me to go on, morning, noon and night."

"If you call talking to one's own child absurd nonsense, I don't," said May, with a great assumption of maternal dignity.

"I must say that it never struck me that you intended

IF YOU HAD PLENTY OF MONEY.

"Thanks to your great generosity in sending me that five thousand pounds I now have plenty of money in my pocket; and am free from the worries and trials of poverty, from which I had suffered so long."

There! if you had reason to write to a man in *that* way what a thing it would be, the money, and your gratitude to him who furnished it in the day of your dire need.

The writer will make no silly pretence of not caring for money. He does care for it, and so do all men and women of sound minds. For money represents about everything in this world worth having, except good health, and in a way money has a deal to do with that.

"Thanks to your wonderful medicine," writes Mr. W. J. Scuffins, of 35 Willow Grove, Burley, Leeds, "I am now enjoying good health after suffering a long time from indigestion.

"In the Spring of 1897 I found my health giving way. My skin turned dull and sallow, and the whites of my eyes actually got as yellow as an old gold coin. Of course you will understand what ailed me; it was biliousness, one of the commonest and meanest of all the ailments that make a man feel like getting down on all fours and doing a crawl.

"My right side, down where the liver is, was so sore I couldn't bear to touch it. When I ate a bit to keep myself from starving, I had such pains in the chest and back I wished I had let food alone; and if there had been a stone weight tied against my chest I couldn't have felt much worse in that region than I did as it was.

"The taste in my mouth was horrible; it almost made me sick. All my strength seemed leaving me, and when I got home at night from work I was so weary and fagged I had to lie down; and now and then I was obliged to leave off work for days.

"Some of my neighbours thought I was going off in a consumption, I got so weak and so thin and used to spit up such a lot of phlegm when I coughed.

"I spent pounds on doctors and their medicines, and but for Mother Seigel's Syrup I don't know what would have become of me. I had been ill fifteen months and am sure I couldn't have stood it much longer.

"The very first bottle of Seigel's Syrup gave me great relief, and the improvement went on until I was strong and well again. Now I have a good appetite and whatever I eat agrees with me.

"I owe my present health to Seigel's Syrup and no amount of money could have given me the comfort and contentment which resulted from the use of that splendid medicine. You are at liberty to publish my statement."—W. J. Scuffins, April 9th, 1900.

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to talk, I thought it was mere babbling, but of course that may be my ignorance. Perhaps you will be kind enough to enlighten me as to the meaning of that much-used word—agoo."

"I shall do no such thing, for I can see that you are sneering both at me and my child. I must say for a man who sets up to be a gentleman, it is an extremely curious way of behaving. I confess I should never have thought you capable of speaking to me in the way you have."

"For goodness' sake don't preach; I am much too tired to listen."

"Very well, then, if my conversation bores you, I most certainly won't remain here any longer," saying which May walked out of the room looking very injured, and kissing her son as she went, murmuring tenderly, "At any rate, your *mother* loves you, you darling."

In spite, however, of the satisfaction of having enjoyed the last word, as she carried baby to the nursery May felt a very queer feeling in her throat, and seemed to have developed a cold in her head, in a remarkably short space of time.

Having left baby in Nurse's charge, and much to that worthy woman's astonishment, having parted from him without any of those little endearments she was wont to use to him before doing so, she proceeded straight to her room.

"Well, I never did," exclaimed Nurse, using that phrase so much beloved by the lower orders of society, which says so little, but is intended to convey so much. "I never did! To think she should leave her first-born without so much as a parting blessing! Never mind my sweety, if your mother forsakes you, your old nurse never will. No thank 'eaven, I tries to do my dooty by you, my hangel, and nought shall tempt my soul to go astray," and then having delivered herself of these lofty and truly elevating sentiments, *a propos* of nothing in particular, she proceeded to undress and bath the infant, feeling in that virtuous frame of mind we all enjoy when we have been saying anything *very* righteous and moral, whatever our acts may be.

In the meanwhile, the unfortunate object of Nurse's displeasure was sitting in her room, weeping bitterly, all her dignity and temper washed away in tears. It must be acknowledged that it was some time before May arrived at this state of penitence. At first she could think of nothing but the contempt with which she considered Jack had treated her son; it was this, she told herself, that wounded her, even more than the way he had spoken to her.

He had not kissed it when he came in, had expressed no desire to look at its mouth and judge for himself as to whether the tooth would be long in coming (which was what anyone with even a moderate share of fatherly feeling would have done), and, in fact, he had behaved disgracefully.

"Yes, disgracefully," she repeated to herself, as she sat by her window looking out into the winter's gloom, with flushed cheeks and eyes full of angry tears, which she was too proud to let fall, "disgracefully; and so I shall tell him when I see him."

By-and-bye, however, her anger began to vanish, and her reflections with regard to Jack were of a milder description. Had she not been a little hasty with him? After all, might he not, perhaps, have reason to complain?

Of course, it was difficult to understand anyone being bored by Baby, with his funny little ways and odd little chuckle; but still, what had her dear old mother said, when she had told her of her plan of bringing him up from his earliest infancy to be a great companion to his father, so that he should learn as soon as possible to enter into all his parent's plans?

"Take care, my dear," had been her mother's words, "that you don't give Jack too much of a good thing."

Well, she had laughed at the time, but was there not some truth in the advice? Perhaps poor Jack had come home tired, quite worn-out, and in no humour for Baby's company, so no wonder he had been a little impatient. There was no doubt he was really very good-tempered; he could not have been feeling so bright as usual, or he would not have been annoyed. It was all her fault for teasing him with her nonsense, and she ought to be ashamed of herself.

Yes, his health was rapidly being ruined, and it was entirely her own doing; upon which, having arrived at this melancholy conclusion, she could no longer restrain her grief, but burst into a flood of tears.

It was at this stage of the proceedings, and while she was sobbing most vehemently, she felt her husband's strong arms round her, as he said gently:

"Don't cry little woman. I'm awfully sorry for all I said."

Then as she looked up at him with a loving though rather watery smile, he continued regretfully:

"I can't think what made me behave to you as I did. I know I was an awful brute, but I was not feeling very fit; not that that is any excuse for the way I spoke to you. But please forgive me, darling."

May's answer to this somewhat incoherent speech was to throw her arms round Jack's neck and give him a good hug, as she said impulsively:

"Why, Jack, I want you to forgive me. I am so sorry I lost my temper."

"My dear, you have no reason to apologise," he replied. "I am sure I wonder you did not give it to me hot as I deserved, and it is only because you are the dearest little girl that ever lived that you did not do so. But let us forget the unpleasant business and kiss and be friends," saying which he suited the action to the word, and the reconciliation was complete.

The only thing that now remained to be done was to pay a visit to the cause of all the trouble, and this was not forgotten, as after a minute or two May and Jack proceeded to the nursery, and, as baby happened to be enjoying his bottle, he chanced to be in a very good temper.

Accordingly, when he saw his parents, he condescended to look up for a moment from his meal, and give them a most amiable smile—a little rapid, perhaps, but still very well-meaning, so that nothing was wanting to complete the family felicity.

After this little episode everything went considerably more smoothly, May realised that a man of thirty and an infant of four months are not very congenial companions, seeing that they can hardly be said to have many ideas in common, and that the former decidedly objects to be deserted for the latter; whilst Jack on his part began to comprehend what an unfailing source of interest and amusement a baby is to womankind in general, and its mother in particular, and so learnt to make allowances for the raptures with which his wife viewed their child. Having arrived, therefore, at a better understanding on the subject, it never again caused any trouble, and if you were now to ask his parents about him, they would tell you that since that time Baby had never been anything to them but a bond of union.

E. K. H.

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The Fox Kettle.

On the beautiful shores of the Bay of Odawarra there lived, many years ago, a young couple. The man was out with the boats fishing for the greater part of the week, whilst his wife strove to make some little addition to their precarious income by the sale of fruits and sweetmeats to travellers.

The fisherman was an honest, sober, hard-working fellow enough, but he had one great fault, and that was a rooted disrespect for the gods of his country.

"What good are they to us?" he would say to his wife, "I may kneel until my legs are sore, I may pray until my voice is hoarse, but for all that the gods don't send the fish into my nets, and I don't see that we get any the better off for all my devotions!"

His wife, who was a soft-speaking, gentle-minded woman always reproached him for the contempt with which he treated the gods, and would answer:

"Nay, Kikuchi, we have health and strength, and surely they are of far more worth than all the riches of the world."

They were sitting one evening over the charcoal brasier, the children were playing on the beach outside, and the kettle was boiling merrily. Suddenly the charcoal shifted, the kettle overturned, scalded the woman's hand, and put out the fire. Kikuchi, who had met with but poor sport during the day, and who was not in the best of humours, broke out into a towering passion, seized the kettle, and flung it out on to the beach.

"Ever since I bought this horrid thing," he cried, "it has done nothing but give us trouble, so there it goes, and we'll get a new one," and he ran out and kicked the kettle angrily about until it disappeared in the waves.

When he returned he found his wife in an agony of tears.

"What is the matter, O'Hana?" he asked.

O'Hana did not reply but merely pointed to a dark corner of the room. Kikuchi looked and saw a large fox staring at him with his red, sparkling eyes.

Seizing a wooden wine measure, he hurled it at the intruder, but the animal was too quick, and the missile crashed through the paper window into the street.

"Oh, Kikuchi, Kikuchi! what have you done?" cried O'Hana. "You've driven Kitsune away!"

Here it should be explained that the fox is held in universal reverence by the Japanese people. The god, Inari, patron of rice, fish, and daily food, is especially fond of assuming the guise of the fox, and his appearance is looked upon, according to circumstances, as a good or evil omen.

"Well, what do I care?" retorted Kikuchi, gulping down a cup of wine. "What do I care for an ugly, red-eyed, prying fox? You believe he's a god, but I know better, and I only wish the thing had hit him."

But O'Hana was very sorrowful for the rest of the evening, and retired to bed with her children earlier than usual.

That night Kikuchi had a terrible dream. The kettle appeared in a flame of fire, and out of the spout a huge fox-brush. It remained at the foot of his quilt all the night, and seemed to glare at him with a couple of large red eyes.

During the next day his eldest boy, a bouncing youngster of seven, sickened. The doctor was called in. He examined the patient's eyelids, and asked: "Have you been quarrelling lately?"

Both husband and wife answered: "No."

"Have you been drinking too much?"

"No."

"Has anything out of the way happened lately?"

"Nothing in particular," said Kikuchi, "I was in a bit of a temper last evening with my old kettle, and kicked it away."

"Kicked a kettle away!" said the doctor, "that's a bad thing to do, for Kitsune is very fond of kettles. I thought that the child must have a devil, so if he takes a little Furidashi, and these twelve pills every half-hour with hot water, he will get over it."

The anxious parents tried the Furidashi and the pills, but with no beneficial effect, for the poor little fellow grew worse and worse. The last remedy was tried—the swallowing of the holy picture worn round every child's neck, dissolved in hot water, but with no success, for he died.

Still, Kikuchi was not convinced that he had done wrong, but continued to rail at the gods in general and at Kitsune in particular, in the wildest manner. The weird apparition still haunted him at nights, his fishing produced nothing, no travellers stopped to buy O'Hana's fruit, and everything went to rack and ruin. Then O'Hana resolved that she would go to the shrine of Inari on the hillside. So, when the moon rose behind the tall, black pine trees, she crept softly away unobserved by her husband, and knelt at the shrine of the god.

"O, Kitsune!" she said, with the tears streaming from her eyes, "I am in great distress. Help me!"

A blaze of light appeared in the shrine, and in the midst of it she saw the great fox god. He looked at her for a moment with kindling eyes, and merely said:

"Find the kettle!" and disappeared.

As she descended the rough path she saw a red glare in the heavens. A terrible thought came across her mind, and, alas, when she arrived at the village she beheld her house in flames, Kikuchi and her children standing outside, and in the midst of the flames was the fox, crying out:

"The kettle! The kettle!"

Kind neighbours sheltered the homeless family for the night. O'Hana told Kikuchi all she had seen, and they started out to find the kettle.

Along the shore, through the village, on the high road, even to the great town they went, and at last in an old iron shop they found the kettle, much battered and bruised. Tenderly they wrapped it up and carried it back to the village: there they polished it, mended up the holes which had been made in its sides, and together they went to the shrine of Inari.

The god appeared as he had appeared to O'Hana, and in terrible tones he said:

"Kikuchi learn from this lesson never to mock at the gods, go and sin no more."

And Kikuchi mended his ways, religiously kept the kettle clean and burnished, paid his devotions twice a day at the shrine of Inari, and was rewarded by continual happiness and prosperity.

Frank Abell.

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MORE ABOUT - -

Mr. HALL CAINE'S

- NEW NOVEL.

In our last issue we made an announcement which has doubtless been received with much satisfaction by the readers of *SHORT STORIES*. We were in the happy position of being able to announce the fact that we had been fortunate enough to secure the serial rights of Mr. Hall Caine's New Novel, and that it would appear exclusively in the pages of our new Magazine for Ladies which will appear on January 10th next.

"THE ETERNAL CITY" is one of those deeply engrossing stories which seem to hold the attention from first to last. Like most, one might say all, that this popular Novelist has written, this new work is of intense human interest; it is a story which will be much talked about, and doubtless there will be no little controversy on its account, but all will admit that underlying it are problems of vital importance to humanity, problems which have through the ages engaged the earnest thought of all social reformers.

As in "The Christian," there is a romantic side to "THE ETERNAL CITY." We think it will be generally acknowledged when this story is given in full, that it is the finest thing Mr. Hall Caine has yet written, and those who have read any of his works will know that that is saying a good deal.

Remember, there will be a large instalment in the first issue of "THE LADY'S MAGAZINE," which will be on sale on January 10th. Order at once, as there will only be a limited edition.

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PEARSON'S WEEKLY

FOOTBALL CLUB PICTURES.

1st Prize - - £50 in Gold.

SECOND LIST

2nd Prize - - - - £10 Note
3rd, 4th, and 5th Prizes - 3 £5 Notes
6th to 20th Prizes - 15 Sovereigns
21st to 40th Prizes - 20 Half-Sovs.

If you cannot find all the names, ask your friends to help you.

Below will be found ten pictures; each picture representing the name of a football club.

If you look at the picture in the margin you will see that the name is Blackburn Rovers. What are the other names?

All you have to do is to write underneath each picture, in the space provided, the name of the club you believe the picture to represent. The names are those of both Rugby and Association clubs. Keep your list by you till another has appeared.

Where the names of two clubs embody that of the same town, but with a different addition, the full title is indicated in the picture.

The prizes will be paid to the competitors from whom we receive the correct, or most nearly correct, solutions.

No more than one prize will go to any competitor.

Example.

Blackburn Rovers.

It must be taken as a condition of the competition that anybody competing therein agrees to abide by the Editor's final decision.

Intending competitors in the above would do well to procure a copy of "The Football Who's Who," which contains the names of most of the big clubs. This book will be found of great service in discovering the names depicted. It only costs a shilling, and may be obtained of all booksellers, and post free for 1s. 3d. from the publisher, 17 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

No. 11.....

No. 12.....

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I send in this coupon as a competitor for the prize advertised in this paper, and subject to the conditions printed on this page:

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1. Coupons may be sent either from "Pearson's Weekly" or "Short Stories."
2. Do not send in your coupons till we tell you.
3. All coupons are sent at senders' risk, and if they go astray, from whatever cause, we do not accept responsibility.
4. Competitors must attach their private address to their attempts. No prize will be sent to any post-office, refreshment rooms, or other places at which letters are called for. Attempts bearing such addresses will be disqualified.

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON Limited, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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RESCUED FROM DRINK

Heroic Work of a Girl in Saving Her Brother from Drunkenness.

Put a Remedy in His Coffee and Without His Knowledge of the Secret Was Completely Cured.

The terrible evil of drunkenness has at last found a conqueror. Miss Mary Roberts, of 1033 Golden Gate Ave., San Francisco, Cal., U.S.A., will gladly tell any lady who will write her how

she saved her brother from ruin, and her words burn with a new hope to every woman who would rescue a son, brother, or husband from the scourge of drunkenness.

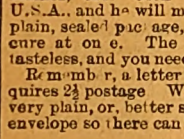
"May every mother, sister, or daughter learn from my experience, is my devout hope, and in thus making public the story of our private misfortune and subsequent blessings it is my earnest desire that every woman read in my words the way to happiness, not only for herself but for the man who is struggling with the curse of liquor upon him. Dr. Haines, who discovered Golden Specific, is deserving of woman's homage, and I am glad to know that he will send a free trial package of the remedy to every woman who writes him.

"Send your name and address to Dr. J. W. Haines, 3243 Glen Bldgs., Cincinnati, Ohio, U.S.A., and he will mail the remedy to you in a plain, sealed package, and thus you can begin the cure at once. The remedy is odorless and tasteless, and you need have no fear of discovery."

Remember, a letter to us from British Isles requires 2½ postage. Write your name and address very plain, or, better still, enclose a self-addressed envelope so there can be no mistake in delivery.

SPECIAL OFFER TO READERS OF "SHORT STORIES."

GOLD CLUSTER RING (Stamped)



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Send size of finger.

with a fine imitation Ruby Sapphire, or Emerald centre surrounded by 12 Real Pearls. Orders for these rings sent off by return post. H. E. JONES, Manufacturing Jeweller, The Junction, Hulme, Manchester.

Unsolicited testimonial of this ring.

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Dear Sir,—I received the ring this morning, with thanks to you; it is very pretty.—Yours respectfully, M. P.

Bankers: Williams, Deacon, Manchester and Salford Bank Ltd.

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You can sell our Jewellery in a few minutes at 1s. 6d. each article. We have thousands of testimonials as to the quality and value both of our Jewellery and Presents.

SEND NO MONEY. WRITE US TO-DAY.

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"TATCHO."

20,000 LARGE (4/6 SIZE) BOTTLES TO BE DISTRIBUTED

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"TATCHO" acts as an invigorating tonic. It stops the hair falling, creates a luxuriant growth, and imparts to it a bright and youthful lustre.

"When I discovered the preparation, I found that I had hit upon a remedy capable of working wonders," said Mr. George R. Sims to the representative of the *Daily Mail*. "Look at my hair now. Look at the colour. In time people got to know. Then the trouble began.

"Letters in thousands poured in to me from men and women in every quarter of the world, from all parts of the Kingdom, from America, India, Africa, China, and Australia. The work of answering the letters was enormous, and as far as possible the desired information was supplied; but it became quite evident that at the rate at which the demand was increasing I should very soon need a large staff of clerks to attend solely to the Hair renewer department of correspondence.

"In consequence, I said to myself. Why should this thing go on? If the public wants my hair renewer, the public shall have it; but the demand must be met in the ordinary business-like way. So I resolved to place the genuine article within reach of all, and with the assistance of a number of gentlemen, possessing the necessary commercial facilities, that has been accomplished."

THE GEO. R. SIMS' COMPANY HAVE DECIDED TO DISTRIBUTE

20,000 LARGE TRIAL BOTTLES OF TATCHO

to enable those who have not yet profited by Mr. G. R. Sims' discovery, to have the opportunity of doing so. The Company does this in the belief that such distribution will enable the preparation to become more widely known, and will introduce it to every home in a far more satisfactory manner than through unlimited puffing by advertisement.

COUPON.

S.S.

Jan. 12, 1901.

If you are desirous of participating in this distribution cut out this Coupon and send it to the Geo. R. Sims' Co., 81c Great Queen Street, London, W.C., accompanied by a postal order for 1/10. You will receive by return of post a plain package containing

A FULL SIZE 4s. 6d. TRIAL BOTTLE OF "TATCHO" POST PAID,

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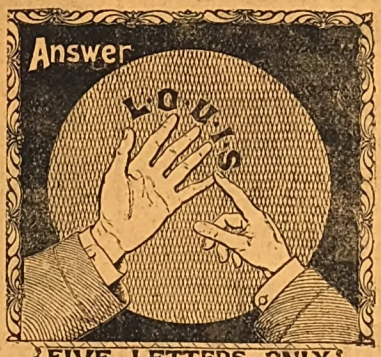

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Every Yard is Stamped L-O-U-I-S

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look at the tyres. If they are not

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the machine is not cheap at any price.

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LADIES should take **DR. SIMPSON'S ARSENICAL PEARLS.** They secure a beautiful clear complexion, free from Blotch, Pimples and Roughness. Post free, **2/9** and **4/6** only, from M. F. THOMPSON'S Homœopathic Chemist, 17 GORDON STREET, GLASGOW.
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A New Invention to keep the feet warm and dry yet allowing perfect ventilation
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State size required.
A boon for tender & tired feet

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FOOTBALL PICTURE COMPETITION. £100 IN PRIZES.

SHORT STORIES

A WEEKLY MAGAZINE FOR HOME AND TRAIN

No. 629. FOR WEEK ENDING JANUARY 19TH, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

A Boon to Dyspeptics.

Quoted from "The Lady."

"In these high pressure days when men and women alike have to work incessantly with brain and hand to hold their own in the great battle of life, it is the exception rather than the rule to find anyone who does not suffer from that insidious and most distressing complaint—Dyspepsia—in one form or another. The most general symptoms of this disease—for it invariably develops into a disease if its progress remains unchecked—are Loss of Appetite on most occasions, varied by craving desires for food which is extremely indigestible; fearful depression of Spirits, together with various aches and pains in nearly every part of the body; the digestive organs refuse to perform their offices in a perfect manner, and, if neglected, the result is too often apparent in the contraction of cancer or tumour in the Stomach, abscess on the Liver, and many serious internal complications. The great remedies for these evils, if taken when Dyspepsia has not yet assumed its later and, in fact, fatal phases, are a really good tonic and a careful diet, combined with sensible health precautions; but hitherto no entirely satisfactory tonic for Dyspeptics has been discovered, as most preparations of the kind contain iron or quinine in some form, which, though valuable preparations in many cases, are devoid of digestive qualities. The preparation known as Guy's Tonic is, however, a wonderfully efficacious remedy. It is entirely free from iron, and therefore does not induce Constipation, a most important consideration. It contains no quinine either, but is composed of Vegetable tinctures from the 'British Pharmacopœia,' and is prepared from the formula of a London physician. It is more than a tonic, as besides strengthening the whole Nervous System and correcting a Sluggish Liver, it assists the process of Digestion in a very great degree; moreover it is pleasant to take."

Flatulence Corrected by Guy's Tonic.

Mr. A. J. Crabb writes from 41 Upper Tulse Hill, London, S.W.,:

"A lady friend of mine, who has been for a long time ineffectually treated by a Physician for Indigestion and Flatulence, wishes you to know that Guy's Tonic has quite cured her. I must say that in all cases where I have recommended Guy's Tonic the effects have been simply marvellous."

Guy's Tonic is a British Preparation of purely Vegetable origin. It is employed with excellent results in Hospital Practice, and is widely recommended by Medical Men. A new size (Six Ounce) Bottle of Guy's Tonic, price 1/1½d., is now on Sale at all Chemists and Stores.

Allen Foster & Co.

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Design No. 2130. 10/6. The Famous Sacque Back Coat and Skirt Costume can be ordered with the coat made double or single-breasted, and is made in Black, Navy, Brown, Grey, Fawn and Red. It has a velvet collar, and the skirt is cut full with the box-pleated back—grand value for **Half-a-Guinea.** Securely packed, and sent carriage paid 6d. extra.

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No. 2720. GOOD 1/6½. VALUE.

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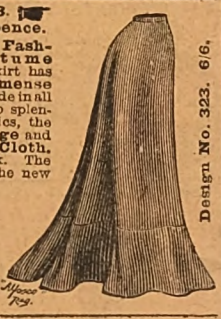

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THE LONDON MANUFACTURERS,
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WARNING. *Instead of using the common White Headache Powders, which generally consist entirely of a crude drug, which has been condemned as dangerous by the medical papers, insist on having a bona-fide anti-quack remedy, recommended by such eminent medical authorities as Dr. RAMAGE, L.R.C.P., Dr. THURSTIN, L.R.C.P., late Dr. BOYD-WILLIAMS (Liverpool), the Editor of the Medical Journal, "Health," etc., etc. The name of this safe remedy is KAPUTINE.*

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Sold by BOOT'S, TAYLOR'S, DAY'S, WHITE'S and other Stores. Most Co-operative Stores sell it.

PACKETS, 1/-. SAMPLES ONE PENNY,

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BILIOUS & NERVOUS DISORDERS,
Sick Headache, Constipation, Wind and Pains in Stomach, Impaired Digestion, Disordered Liver, and Female Ailments.

SALE OVER SIX MILLION BOXES YEARLY.

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Real Silver Watch
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Set with REAL DIAMONDS and other stones.

SEND NO MONEY.

NO MONEY REQUIRED. WE TRUST YOU.

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We do not want your money.

Just send us a stamped addressed envelope and say that you will either sell the jewellery or return it to us if you fail to sell it. On receiving your letter we will at once post you the jewellery.

When sold, send us the 13/6 you have received for same, and we will at once send you ABSOLUTELY FREE our £2 10s. Real Silver Watch with Chain, or the Gold Ring, whichever you desire.

A WRITTEN GUARANTEE for TEN years sent with each watch.

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BRITISH PREMIUM SYNDICATE (Dept. 5).
282 CENTRAL CHAMBERS, GLASGOW.

2/9 CHALLENGE TO THE WORLD—OUR WARRANTED **TIMEKEEPER,** **2/9**

With a guarantee to keep correct time for three years, will be sent to any address on receipt of P.O. or stamps value 2/9 and three stamps extra for postage. To every purchaser during this month we give with it ABSOLUTELY FREE a strong Mexican SILVER CHAIN. All we ask of you is to show them to your friends, as by doing so you advertise our business.

GENEVA WATCH IMPORTERS,
148 Old Street, London, E.C.

GEO. R. SIMS'

"TATCHO"

4/6
Trial Bottles To-day
1/10

Address—**GEO. R. SIMS CO.,**
81c Great Queen Street, London, W.C.

ALL FAT PEOPLE

can safely **Reduce Weight and cure Corpulency permanently** by taking **TRILENE TABLETS** (Regd.) for a few weeks. They are small, agreeable, harmless, and never fail to IMPROVE both HEALTH and FIGURE without Change of Diet. An English Countess writes: "*Your Trilene Tablets act admirably.*"

Send 2s. 6d. to **THE TRILENE CO.,** Sole Proprietors, **66 Finsbury Pavement, London.**

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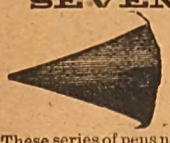
Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 87 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 23 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1½ stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 2lb., and I am cured." Mrs. Darnley-Smith, of Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, says: "Tablets have reduced me very much." Mrs. Crossley, of Rose Hill, Torver, Comston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

VARICOCELE.

Every man suffering from Varicocele and the allied troubles, should send for treatise, describing their Causes, Symptoms, Results, and Successful and Painless Treatment without surgical operation or the use of cumbersome trusses and electrical appliances. Will be sent sealed, post free, three stamps.

S. S. MURRAY,
7 Southampton Row, London, W.C.

SEVEN PRIZE MEDALS.



C. BRANDAUER & Co's CIRCULAR POINTED PENS

These series of pens neither scratch nor spurt. They glide over the roughest paper with the ease of a soft lead pencil. Assorted sample boxes, 6d., to be obtained from all Stationers. If out of stock, send 7 stamps direct to the works, Birmingham.

ESTABLISHED 1851.

BIRKBECK BANK

Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, London.

2% on CURRENT ACCOUNTS, on the minimum monthly balances when not drawn below £100.

The BIRKBECK ALMANACK, with full particulars, post free.

FRANCIS RAVENSCROFT, *Manager.*

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SHORT STORIES

No. 629.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending January 19th, 1901.

BALLARAT JEMMY.

"BOY, bring me another cheroot!"

I had breakfasted luxuriously off roast fowl and curries innumerable, and, last but not least, a bottle of beer, cooled and refreshed in wet cloths hung in the wind.

Prefaces are laborious; let me put the matter briefly. Time, about half past twelve; place, on the borders of the district of Kegalle, in Ceylon; *dramatis personæ*, myself, aged twenty-eight, not troubled with humility, believing myself the most rising member of the Ceylon Civil Service, to which I have the honour to belong, and mightily proud of my district (Kegalle, as aforesaid), to the charge of which I had recently been appointed.

I was now on circuit work, and from six till eleven that morning I had been hard at work settling land claims of the natives; I had ridden fourteen miles, and walked about six, floundering through paddy fields and tramping through low scrub jungle alternately, so that I considered that I had well earned my bottle of beer at breakfast, a luxury which I never allowed myself except when on circuit in the district; for I had due regard for my liver, and intended to give the Service the benefit of all my energies for as many years as possible; good people were scarce, therefore I drank nothing stronger than claret when I was at my head-quarters in the town of Kegalle itself.

"Look sharp with that cheroot, boy!" I call again. And soon I am leaning back in a comfortable chair in

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the Rest House, with my second cheroot well alight, watching the blue smoke from my manilla with the just satisfaction of a man privileged by toil to be lazy for a while.

Behind me, in the outhouses of the Rest House, I hear the hum of voices from my servants and the peons who are eating their rice and curry placidly, while there is a measured thud, thud, of paddy being pounded for my horses, who neigh little, short, expectant neighs at the welcome sound. Before me a dusty road, white and hot in the noonday tropical sun; a long stretch of paddy field; and away behind them the quiet hills loom up against the cloudless sky, steep rising in verdant splendour of untouched virgin jungle, with here and there a clearing where some coffee estate proclaims civilisation, money-making and vandalism marring the world-old beauty of forest and hill.

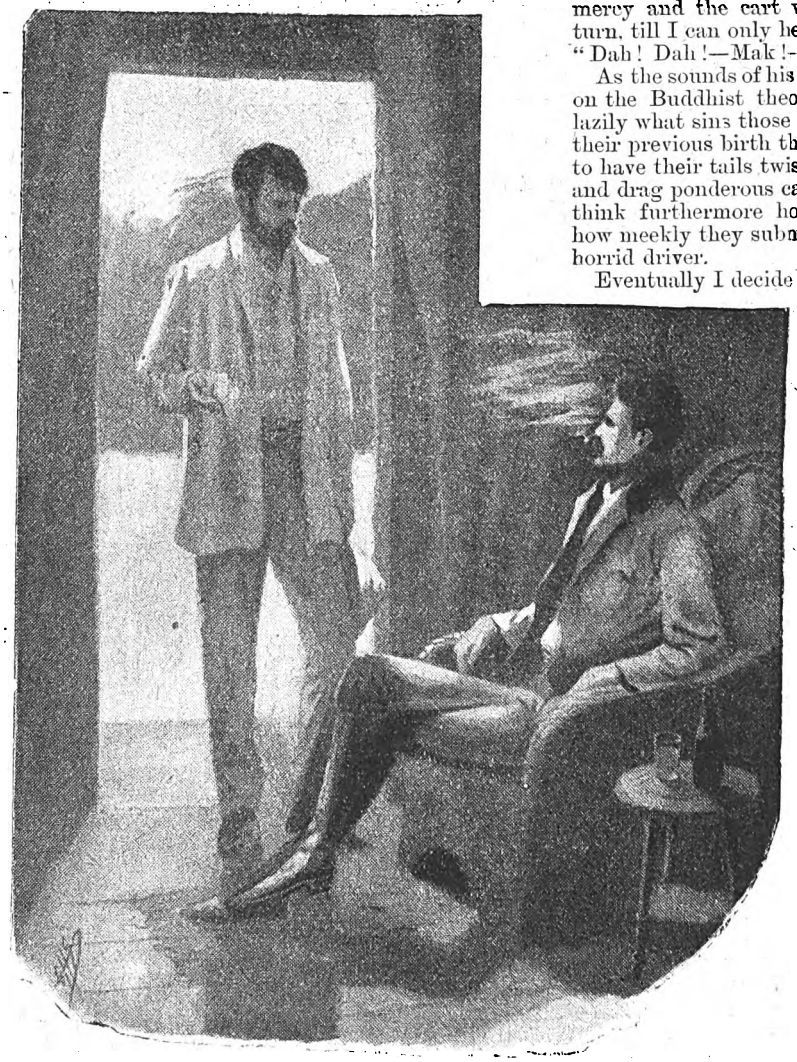
In the cool trees around the Rest House squirrels chirp and call, and gorgeous butterflies float lazily; while just in front of me a woodpecker, rich in crimson and speckled brown and red, hangs and swings and taps the twigs of a great suriya tree with his long beak; and a pretty humming-bird fly-catcher flits backwards and forwards dealing death among the countless flies that hum under the shadow of the trees.

I watch him over my cheroot with his deft curved length of bill; once he has a great fight with a butterfly which he tries to devour; but the butterfly is three times as big as he is, and sails away triumphantly over the trees into the road.

Presently a bullock-cart comes toiling and creaking along the road, the driver shrieking and swearing at his bullocks as only Singhalese bullock-drivers can—"Mak! Mak!—Dah!—Pita!—You sons of seven low-caste dhoby-women!—Mak!—Dah!" he yells in his high nasal voice, twisting the tails of the poor brutes as they struggle painfully up the steep road, with their patient necks bowed down by the heavy yoke. But the man has no mercy and the cart winds slowly out of sight round a turn, till I can only hear the yells of the driver faintly: "Dah! Dah!—Mak!—Mak!—Pita!—Dah!"

As the sounds of his abuse die away I fall to meditating on the Buddhist theory of transmigration. I wonder lazily what sins those poor bullocks had committed in their previous birth that they should be born again now to have their tails twisted more than half off their backs, and drag ponderous carts up heavy, dusty hills. And I think furthermore how patiently they bear it all, and how meekly they submit to the shrill nagging of that horrid driver.

Eventually I decide that their next birth will be in a higher circle and to better things; perhaps their present long-suffering will be rewarded by their being born hereafter as Singhalese drivers themselves, while their driver will be born in his turn as a bullock; and I am considering whether they too would twist tails and yell and swear, when I heard the sharp trotting of a horse down the road, and in another minute an Englishman—a coffee-planter clearly—has drawn rein opposite to the Rest House, and is talking to one of my peons, who is swaggering on the roadside after his breakfast, showing off his belt and badge before some women and large-eyed children, taking a chew of betel condescendingly from the prettiest of the young mothers, in return for some enormous lie which he has been telling them concerning the greatness of his master and by consequence of himself.



The planter comes up looking very hot and tired, and is introducing himself to me.

The peon drops his swagger, and is submissively answering the planter; then I see him direct him to the Rest House, and the planter comes up looking very red and tired, and is introducing himself to me.

"My name is MacFarlane,"

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he says, "and I am very glad to have met you. I was posting into Kegalle for the District Judge, on a sad business; but you are a Justice of the Peace, are you not? and if you can kindly come with me it will save a great deal of time and a long ride."

"Yes. I am a Justice of the Peace," I answer, "though I don't do the judicial work of the district. I am the Government agent, you know." (We Revenue-officers rather look down on the judicial branch of the Civil Service, be it known.)

"So your peon told me; but if you can come with me I shall be most awfully obliged," and the planter mops his streaming forehead and looks terribly hot, poor fellow.

I take pity on him.

"Come in and have some beer; you seem quite knocked up. You can tell me what is the matter while you are drinking it, and I will see if I can help you."

He accepts gratefully, and empties a bottle of beer at a draught.

"That is a relief to a weary man," he says; "now let me tell you all about it. Well, there has been a poor neighbour of mine who has died last night from an overdose of laudanum. He was a queer, rough, hard-up sort of man—an Australian Yankee—and he and another man of the same cut, whom we always call Ballarat Jemmy, came over from Australia a few years ago, and bought an estate next to mine. We never saw much of them, though; they kept quite to themselves, living on nothing but cheese and brandy, I believe; chiefly brandy; and they got harder up, and less sociable, and less respectable every year, till we hardly knew they existed. But this morning, poor Ballarat Jemmy came rushing over to my bungalow, saying he had murdered Jock—that is Jock Braun, his partner, the dead man. I asked him what he meant, and how he had done it; and he said that Jock had been wild for days with toothache, and at last he had found some laudanum, and made him take it, and he must have taken an over-dose.

"Anyhow, he is dead; and poor Ballarat is drinking himself mad, and vows he is the man's murderer. I got some of the neighbours together, and we talked to Ballarat, and told him it was an accident, and no murder; and he won't let us bury the body, but insists on an inquest, and says a magistrate must be brought, and that he will give himself up as Jock's murderer, and be hanged. So at last I rode off for a magistrate, and I am heartily glad I met you on the road. I do hope you will come with me."

I thought a minute.

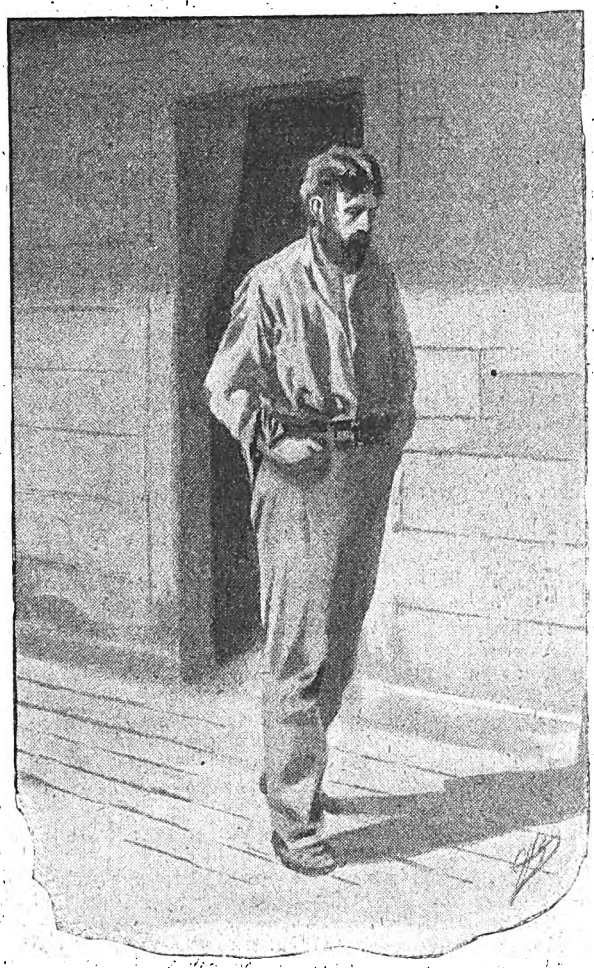
"How far is it?" I ask.

"Sixteen miles. I will gladly give you a bed for the night if you can come."

"Thanks. Yes, I will come and see if I can do any good. It is no murder, of course, if the facts are as you have told me; but I am a coroner among other things, you know, and we can have an inquest and relieve the poor fellow's mind."

A few hasty orders to my servants about bringing on my baggage, and Mr. Macfarlane and I are riding off together up the road, towards the hills which I had been watching so lazily half-an-hour ago, on past the patient bullocks and their driver, steadily cantering up the winding, zig-zag road, until at last Mr. Macfarlane's horse gave in, and the rest of the journey was performed at foot's pace.

Eventually we come to an estate, with its long, regular lines of neatly-kept coffee bushes sloping up from the road, and tidy coolie buildings with laughing, black babies, and baby nurses hardly bigger than themselves, crawling and rolling about on the stamped mud floors, playing with goats and pariah dogs twice their own size, while the fathers and mothers and brothers are away at work.



He kept on walking restlessly up and down the verandah.

When they see Mr. Macfarlane they laugh and call out at him, and some of the bigger ones come running towards him; but they stop when they see my stranger face.

"This is my estate," says he; "we have not far to go now."

Then he throws some small money to the children, and babies and baby nurses and goats and dogs all mix up in a general scramble, the nurses rolling over the babies, and the dogs playing high jinks with the little, black, sprawling legs and arms, while the goats jump and prance with their stiff-looking, stupid legs.

"Happy little beggars, aren't they?" says Mr. Macfarlane. "I always say my coolies are the best in the district. Nothing like looking after them well."

I am still watching a small nurse of some five years old lugging a baby of as many months out of the way of a big pig which has come up to see what the excite-

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ment is about, when we turn a sudden corner in the road, and I hear Mr. MacFarlane saying:

"There, that is the bungalow we are bound for."

And away on the top of the next hill I see a small single bungalow, and soon we are passing more coolie lines and more children; but such a contrast to those we had just left; ragged, untidy buildings, and squalling, quarrelling children fighting all over the place.

"I see this estate is like its masters," I remark; "I suppose these men don't look after their belongings as you do."

"No; poor Ballarat Jemmy is too fond of the bottle, and the dead man was worse; and they had no money much, poor fellows, and the estate is gone to the dogs, and the coolies, too; they struck work the other day—had not had any pay for six months, I heard."

"I wonder the coolies stopped on the estate so long without their money; how did they manage?" I ask.

"Oh, the coolies trusted them—it is only an odd man in a hundred does not pay up; but then when one man does smash he does no end of harm to the rest of us. But here we are!"

And, as we ride up, I see nine or ten men sitting at one end of the verandah, neighbours who had come in at the news to see what they could do for poor Ballarat Jemmy in his trouble. But they could do nothing. Ballarat would not let them touch the body till a magistrate had come. As each man had arrived, he had come out to meet the new-comer with a bottle of brandy and a pot of tobacco.

"You meant all square in coming, I don't doubt," he said to each, "but you can't do nowt; I ain't a-going to have a thing touched till the beak comes, and he may do as he likes then. So just you sit you down there and leave me alone; I'm kinder dazed; here's brandy and here's baccy; I ain't got no soda water; can't afford it; but the brandy's good, and so's the baccy; so sit you down, and leave me alone; I'm kinder dazed; kinder dazed, I am."

He had said this in a sort of set speech to each arrival, and the men had gradually congregated together and taken refuge in their pipes, whispering and wondering a good deal, but growing gradually comforted with the soothing fumes, and waiting for the magistrate patiently in quiet expectation and subdued excitement of a house of death. Now and again one of them had called to Ballarat Jemmy, advising him to join them and have a pipe himself for comfort's sake. But he would not be talked to.

"Leave me alone, and sit you down, can't you?" he would say. "I'm kinder dazed, I am; kinder dazed."

And all that day he kept on walking restlessly up and down the verandah, with his hands rammed down sullenly in his trousers' pockets, and his head sunk forward on his chest, pacing backwards and forwards unceasingly like a beast in a cage, stopping only at times for a great drink of raw brandy.

When he saw our horses he came out to us.

"You'll be the beak, sir," he says in a queer, submissive way to me.

I hardly know what to answer. I tell him how sorry I am to hear of his trouble, and I ask if I may come in.

"Yes, yes; come in. I give myself up to you—I murdered him—he's in there, he is; poor Jock, you know," and he jerks his thumb over his shoulder to a closed window; "mayhap MacFarlane has told you as how I killed him?" he continues.

"I hope you are distressing yourself very needlessly," I answer encouragingly: "Mr. MacFarlane has told me that your poor friend has died from an overdose of udanum while he had bad toothache. As I understand the matter, all that you did was to advise him to take the laudanum. It was his own fault that killed him. It was all an accident, was it not?"

"Ay, ay; but he wouldn't have took it if I hadn't give it him; and we've been chums together fourteen year—fourteen year, Jock and I—and now I've killed him," and he hiccoughed, and turned unsteadily to lead the way into the bungalow. Mr. MacFarlane looks at me.

"He's more drunk than I ever saw him, poor wretch," he whispers; "as a rule he can drink all day and never show it. I think you had better have the inquest, and get it all over as soon as possible."

As we enter the verandah there is a great introducing of me all round to the batch of men who had been sitting there; some are nice gentlemanly fellows, some rough, very rough indeed. I make up a coroner's jury out of them, and they begin to look very important.

"Has anyone a Bible to take the oaths upon?"

There is a blank look from man to man, and two or three men begin to rummage through the bungalow in search of one.

Ballarat Jemmy is walking up and down the verandah again now, a strange melancholy picture, with his rough shaggy beard and hair, and dirty red flannel shirt, and queer baggy trousers. He mutters incessantly to himself as he walks:

"Fourteen years, fourteen years; we were together fourteen years, Jock and I—down at Ballarat I met him first—fourteen years; and now I've been and murdered him!"

Presently he stops suddenly, and comes up to us.

"I ask your pardon, Mister Magistrate, and yours too, MacFarlane; I clean forgot the liquor; I'm kinder dazed, you see; but here's the brandy; liquor up, gentlemen, liquor up. I ain't got no soda, but the brandy's good."

Then he goes on with his restless walk, up and down, up and down the long verandah. One of the men who has been hunting for a Bible goes up to him.

"I say, Ballarat, have you got such a thing as a Bible in the bungalow? The magistrate wants one to swear us upon."

"Fourteen years, fourteen years," he is muttering, "fourteen years, old Jock and me—eh? What? a Bible? No, there ain't no Bible here, I guess; I ain't seen a Bible for many a day."

In my pocket I have a small prayer-book, which I always carry with me; it was given me by my mother, when I went to school; and I am superstitious about it, and never part from it.

"I have a prayer-book; as we can't get a Bible, I will swear you on the prayer-book," I tell them.

And now my jury is sworn, and we go in to view the body. The dead man is lying grim and ghastly in a squalid, ill-kept room; he is lying over on his stool; on the stool is a nearly empty bottle of laudanum, a bottle of brandy, and a bottle of Bunter's nervine.

"The bottle of nervine looks as if the story about the toothache were true, gentlemen," I remark to the jury. "Now for examining the witnesses."

But there was little in the way of evidence to be taken. The servant was examined, and deposed that the dead man had been mad with toothache for some days. He had drunk a great deal of brandy; because of the pain, he supposed; but he always drank a great deal.

He did not know what time the dead master had gone to bed, but early this morning, when he was boiling the kettle, he heard the other master calling out, and he showed him this master dead.

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No one else knew anything, except Ballarat Jemmy himself. Was he willing to give evidence?

"Yes, in course he would tell all he knew."

He took the prayer-book in his hand to be sworn; then suddenly he stopped, and turned to me.

"Is this here right, Mister Magistrate? Ought I to be swore? You see as how I'm the prisoner; prisoner at the bar, for murder," he hiccoughed. "They don't swear prisoners, do they?"

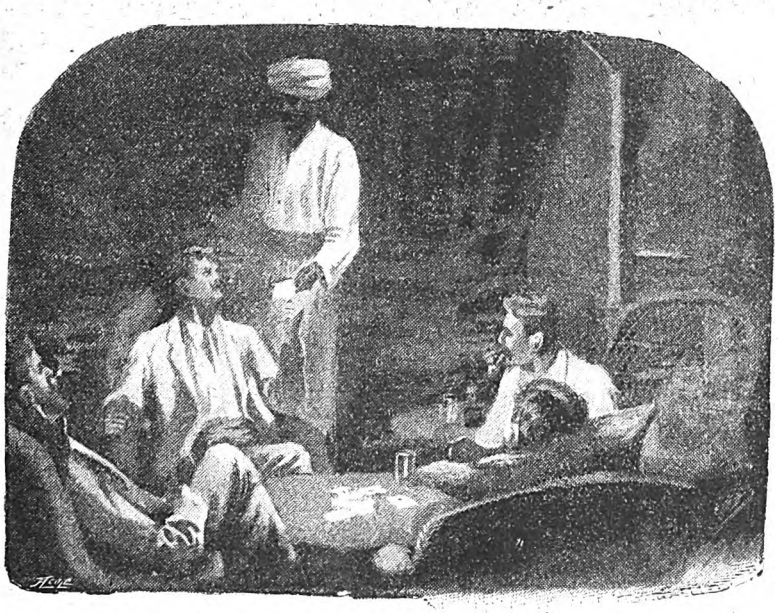
I explain to him that he is not a prisoner at all; that the whole thing is clearly an accident, and that he may be sworn like any other man. But he is obstinate.

"I murdered him! Poor Jock! I'm a prisoner. I'll none be swore."

So we humour him, and take his statement instead.

"We were together fourteen year, Jock and me," he says; "I met him at the diggings, at Ballarat, down in Australia; we smashed up there, we did; digging didn't pay, digging didn't. Well, we were main cleared out, but we had no money to go anywhere else with, and so we held on, digging and digging till one day the luck turned, and we made a good bit. We went on the spree then, and made the money fly fine—lived in first-class hotels, and drove a pair o' spanking horses. Then Jock got D.T. badly, real bad he was. And the money was getting low, and we were wondering what to do next, when we met a chap from Ceylon, and he put us on to coffee planting—Eh? you don't want all this yarn, don't you?—only about poor Jock's death? Well, it was three days ago now, as Jock got toothache awful bad; he got kinder mad, poor fellow, and couldn't get drunk nohow, though he drank and drank all he could to drown the pain. Then we wrote down for some stuff to cure him, and the shop people sent that Bunter's nervine; but it wasn't no good, none at all. It may be rare good stuff for an ordinary man, but nothing would have done poor Jock no good. But last night I was sitting making up some cartridges, and I came across an old bottle of laudanum. So I says to Jock, 'try this, old man, it may put you off to sleep and give you some rest from the darned pain.' And he took it with him and went off to bed. Well, I turned in myself soon after. And in the morning I got up, and went round to see how he was, and he was lying just like that—just like that; and I've been kinder dazed ever since—killed *him*, my old chum!—and we was together fourteen year, him and me! What do you say to *that*, gentlemen?"

And he looks round on us half-defiantly.



A servant came in with a note for me.

"There is nothing to say except that it is very sad and very unfortunate," I answer; "and do try and relieve your mind about your having killed the poor fellow; I am sure you may absolve yourself of all blame in the matter."

"No; I killed him sure enough. I give him the laudanum, and I ought to have seen him take it, and not to have left him to himself. It's my fault, clear enough!"

"Well, we will leave it to the jury. What is your verdict, gentlemen?"

"Death from an overdose of laudanum taken accidently while in pain. And we acquit Mr. James Fergusson of all blame," was the ready reply.

Ballarat Jemmy stood looking doubtfully.

"Mr. James Fergusson! Well, that's me right enough, but I ain't heard that name long enough? And so you won't punish me, eh?"

There was a murmur of voices trying to comfort him, but he turned away sullenly.

"I wish that you'd hang me and have done with me!" he burst out passionately once.

It was necessary to arrange about the funeral without delay. A man is dying, dead, and buried, all within twenty-four hours in the tropics.

There was no churchyard or cemetery nearer than Kegalle, and it was impossible to take the poor body so far as that. Ballarat was spoken to about it.

"We want no churchyard, him and me; we shouldn't know where we was, not in a churchyard. Lay him out in the coffee—under them trees, over there, we was always fond of looking at those trees from the verandah of an evening," and he pointed to a clump of tall satin-wood trees, which stood up grandly against the evening sky. I take a turn outside while the men are arranging for the burial. Away under the trees the coolies are already hard at work digging the grave. From the jungle beyond deep voices of birds come weirdly, striking jarringly on my ear. I think of the sweet song of the thrushes and blackbirds at home, so different from this deep "whoop, whoop, whoop," of hoarse-throated jungle birds. And inside the bungalow that dead form, and that poor drunken, miserable Ballarat, and the brandy bottles, and the wretched furniture—Bah! It makes my flesh creep!

Mr. MacFarlane comes up to me shortly.

"We have laid the poor fellow out and wrapped him in a sheet," he says, "there is no coffin or anything; it is very horrid, is it not? I shall be thankful when it is all over!"

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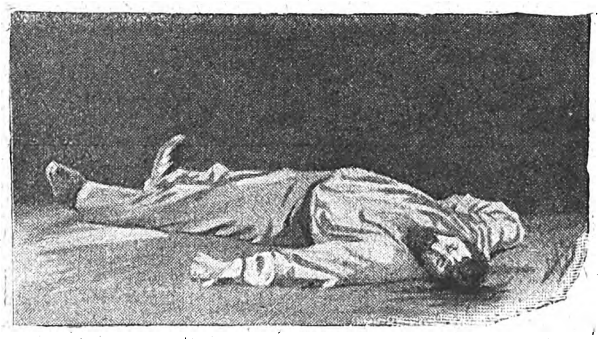
"So shall I!" I ejaculate.

"And there was one thing particularly uncanny," Mr. MacFarlane proceeds, "you remember that one arm was lying over the side of the bed?—well, when we tried to straighten him, this arm kept rising up, time after time; he was so rigid."

I shudder, and pull hard at my cheroot, and say nothing.

Presently, they bring the sheeted figure outside, and a procession is formed silently, Ballarat walking in front, twitching his hands nervously, but not uttering a sound.

As we draw near the grave, bright zodiacal rays shoot up from the sun which has just sunk behind the hills,



He had shot himself through the head.

and the whole sky burns and flames like a sapphire on fire. I am asked to read a few prayers, and I have just finished saying the Lord's Prayer, and two out of the Burial Service, when Ballarat calls out suddenly:

"Hold hard a bit!"

Then he runs off quickly to the bungalow, while a couple of men follow him to see what is the matter.

But in a moment he re-appears, with a bottle of brandy and a tumbler; and, before our wondering disgust had realised the situation, he pours out a great draught.

"I've forgot the water, but never mind, I won't keep you while it comes, gentlemen," he says.

Then he goes on:

"When a man's friend is going a journey, gentlemen, a man always drinks to his luck before he starts, don't he?—well, you see Jock, he's going a long journey now I reckon; and I should not like to let him go without wishing him luck!"

He brushes a great tear from his cheek with his dirty trembling hand, and stands over his dead friend; then he turns down the sheet from the still face and stands looking at it quietly for a few seconds.

At last, raising the glass high over his head, he calls out in a loud voice:

"Good-bye, Jock! Good-bye, old man! We've been together fourteen years, Jock, you and me; and you're going away from me now, Jock, clean away, and I'm main sorry, old man, and it's all my own fault as killed you! But you won't bear me no ill-will, Jock? I never meant no harm—you know that right enough? Good-bye, old man! We'll be meeting again soon, I reckon, somewhere, I don't rightly know where, but here's luck to you, Jock, here's luck to you, old man, wherever you are!"—and he drains the dram at a draught. "Now bury him," he says, and turns away.

But at this moment a cry of horror burst from the coolies. Slowly and weirdly the dead man's arm rises up, thrusting aside all coverings, till it stretches forth grim and ghastly—towards Ballarat.

He had turned sharply back again, hearing the disturbance. For a minute he stands gazing stupidly; then he mutters, "He's a-calling me," and he goes up solemnly and takes the dead hand in his, and stands speechless.

A chill of horror makes me dizzy and faint. We all stand spell-bound, watching the hideous scene. I hear Mr. MacFarlane giving hurried directions to one coolie who had not fled with the others; he is explaining that it is the rigid arm which they had had so much trouble with recently; it has risen up again, and has gone back to its old attitude, as it had lain stretched over the bedside.

Meanwhile Ballarat stands silently holding the dead hand in his own, gazing away to the paling sky in the west with a strange, fixed gaze, quite different to the stupid stare of his face before.

The tears course rapidly down his cheeks for a while. Then he moves suddenly away.

"God bless you, Jock!" he murmurs.

* * * * *

How we finished that hideous funeral I hardly know. My brain was sick with the morbid horror of it all.

But a hospitable and bright dinner with Mr. MacFarlane at his pretty bungalow had somewhat revived me, and we were cheering ourselves with a rubber of whist with a couple of other planters who had come home with Mr. MacFarlane, when a servant came in with a note for me.

I opened it, and with some difficulty spelt it out.

SIR,—I was riting to Mr. MacFarlin, but thort it wood be better to rite to you, being a Magistrat. You all sw as how poor Jock called me to come to him. I made up my mind as I stood holding his hand over the grave. I ni o h's to say that I did myself what I'm a-going to do now. No one can say as I done it from cowardice; bacos you all acquitted me of murder. I'm a-doing it becos Jock called me to come; that is all. Me and him have been to ge her fourteen years, and I reckon he can't do without me, an I wants me with him. He wood a-come after me if I had gone first, so I'm just going after him. I'm sorry to take up so much of your time, sir; but I want you to come when you get this, an I bury me by Jock, so as we may be together.

You will find Brandy on the table. I've only got three bottles left, but I hope you will find it enough,

Your obedent servant,
JAMES FERGUSSON.

"From Ballarat Jemmy," exclaimed Mr. MacFarlane, as I read the letter aloud. "He's going to kill himself! Heaven grant we may be in time to stop it!"

We set off in hot haste through the night for poor Ballarat's bungalow, going the quickest way, but the fellow was quite dead when we arrived. He had sent his servant away with the letter to me, and then he had shot himself through the head. On the table, placed under one of the brandy bottles, was an open sheet of paper.

Please do as I arsked you in my letter.

That was all—all except the poor body on the floor, and the gun that did the deed.

We laid him with poor Jock that very night, lighted by the bright, quiet moon.

The next day I left Mr. MacFarlane, and went on with my regular circuit work; but the memory of that scene haunted me for many a long day, and I never saw the great quiet moon shining over the still hills where the Coffee Estates lay without thinking sadly enough of poor Ballarat Jemmy.

JAMES HARBER.

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FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY.

THE wind howled and whistled mournfully round the houses, making people involuntarily shiver and edge their chairs nearer to the fire. Seated in a house in the Belvedere Road was a man, young, yet looking prematurely old. The fire in his room had gone completely out, yet, cold though it was, Edward Saxon did not feel it. The chill which he felt was at his heart. Two days ago he had been one of the happiest men in creation—happy in the possession of a lovely wife and a bonny, prattling, three-year-old daughter. Now his home was left to him desolate, his wife and child had gone. He had been away on a visit to a friend. On his return he had found the house silent and deserted.

Dreading he knew not what he rushed from room to room, but all he found was a note addressed to himself.

"Dear Edward," said the letter, "the longing for the old life has overcome me. The life you offered me seemed attractive in its restfulness at first, but now it has grown dull and monotonous. No society, no excitement, nothing but long dissertations on your medical theories. Had you not been so utterly absorbed in these you might have noticed my growing discontent. I have tried to rouse you, but no, you were too deep in those musty tomes. I accepted an offer abroad a month ago. Long before you arrive back from your visit I shall be gone, and Gladys will go with me. With me she will have the pleasures and joys of childhood, whereas, had I left her she would have grown up dull and old-fashioned, even if not neglected, while you were endeavouring to probe the recesses of your fellow creatures' brains. Finally, I loved you, Edward, until you let your studies shut me out of your inmost life. then the love of the old life came back with redoubled force and I am now going to tread the boards again, but under a new name and in a new land. Good-bye, Edward. If there had been more heart in your researches and less brain, you would probably not have suffered this loss.

"ALICIA."

When the young doctor read this missive he groaned in agony. The accusation his wife brought against him was only too true. He was ambitious. He wanted to become famous in his profession as a specialist. Now he recognised how selfish his ambition had made him. After the first few months of wedded bliss—what happy days those were—he had gradually withdrawn himself from the round of social gaieties leaving his wife to go practically her own way, while he buried himself in his books. Had he only studied the heart as well as the brain, just as Alicia said, this catastrophe might have been averted.

"What will fame be to me now?" he muttered. "Oh! if I could only find Alicia, and tell her that we will live the days of our early married life over again," and the young aspirant for fame leant his head on the table and sobbed aloud.

Next morning he went out early and purchased copies of all the dramatic papers. Having secured these he drove round to the house of a friend, who, before his retirement, had been a very successful private detective.

His hasty and violent tug at the door betokened his frame of mind and brought a quick response. It was Arthur Somerset, the ex-detective who opened the door.

"Good gracious, Ned, what on earth's the matter with you? You look positively ill," exclaimed Somerset, as he saw Edward Saxon's face.

"Don't for goodness' sake, stand there asking questions, Somerset, but lead the way indoors and listen to what I have to say," replied the doctor.

"All right, old boy, but you gave me a shock."

So saying, the surprised Somerset ushered his visitor into a drawing-room, and pulling two chairs up to the fire, requested him to proceed.

With much agitation, Saxon told the story of his wife's flight.

"I suppose this means I am desired to get into harness again, eh?" remarked Somerset.

"Will you undertake it?" asked his friend eagerly.

"Certainly I will. Now to get to work. In the first place we must make a list of all the companies which have recently left, or are leaving England, and then I will go round and see the various agents."

"I will come with you."

"You'll do nothing of the kind. You must go home and attend to your patients, but leave those brain studies alone for a day or two."

Edward Saxon took his departure for home in a more hopeful frame of mind. He had great faith in the abilities of his friend, and he also thought if he could only come face to face with Alicia again he would be able to wean her from the glare of the footlights by his assurance of love.

Still his heart was anything but light. He reproached himself that ever his neglectfulness should have been so pronounced as to admit of a rival—though an inanimate one—stealing the affection of his wife from him.

That evening Arthur Somerset came round to the desolate home.

"Any news, Somerset?" was the first hasty inquiry.

"Steady, my boy, steady. Give me a chance."

"Well, what have you done?"

"To begin with, five companies have left our shores within the last month, and two others are leaving this week."

"What are they?"

Somerset enumerated the names of the companies.

"Now," he went on, "it is possible your wife may be going out to join one of those which has already gone, or she may be engaged in either of the two leaving this week."

On the ensuing day Somerset went round to interview

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the various agents, while the distracted husband went down to a newspaper office to insert the following advertisement in the agony column:

> Alicia—am taking up heart as well as brain. Come and help me.

When Somerset called that evening it was only to report failure. He had been unable to find the slightest trace of either the wife or the child. Edward Saxon looked gloomy.

"There is another chance, Edward," remarked the detective, after a few moments' thought. "Possibly, it is to join a company already out in one of the colonies or the States, that your wife has gone. To-morrow I will commence a tour of the steamship offices. Have you a photograph of your wife?"

"I am afraid that won't be of much assistance if Alicia is determined to veil her identity. She was an adept in the art of making up."

Edward Saxon's dismal prognostications proved only too correct. They were unable to get hold of any information that would yield a clue as to what part of the globe Alicia Saxon had sailed to resume her histrionic career.

Her husband's cup of bitterness was indeed full. Alicia was a woman whose nature demanded something more than a mere passive affection, and in the latter days he had allowed his ambition to make him thoughtless and inattentive—not that he loved her less, only the evidences of his affection were absent.

* * * * *

In a pretty little cottage away down in Surrey two women were seated, engaged in an earnest discussion.

"What if our scheme should have the opposite effect to what I desire, Frances?"

"Have no fear, my dear girl, I have not the slightest hesitation in guaranteeing you that it will turn out a glorious success."

"Oh! I do trust it will. Ned never intended to hurt me, I know, but I was deeply grieved time after time. One of my favourite tricks was to steal up quietly behind his chair and surprise him. In those happy early days he would turn round like a flash. 'Ah! you little witch,' he would exclaim, and then he would kiss me. But recently, whenever I have done this he would not even look up. 'Alicia,' he would say in an impatient tone, 'I wish you wouldn't disturb me. I am engaged upon a very difficult piece of work.' While he was engaged upon problems and theories having for their object the relief of the brains of others, he never realised that my heart was in need of relief."

"Well, I imagine he knows what heartache is now."

"Poor old Ned," murmured Mrs. Saxon, wistfully.

"I wonder if it has hurt him much."

"Serve him right if it has."

"Frances, how can you?"

"There, there, don't get indignant, my dear. But it will do him good to suffer a little."

Frances Claridge left the room shortly to prepare for her daily journey up to town.

She was engaged at the Comedy Theatre, where Alicia had appeared in the days before her marriage. During those days a very warm friendship had sprung up between the two girls, and this friendship had not been allowed to lapse when Alicia Wentworth had allowed the handsome young doctor to persuade her to abandon the profession.

Just prior to the events recorded in this story Alicia, looking thoroughly unhappy, had met her friend in town one afternoon. In answer to Frances Claridge's inquiry Alicia had poured out the story of her griefs, thereby exciting at once her friend's sympathy and indignation.

"Just like a man," she exclaimed. "As soon as he has gained his object he falls off in his attentions. He must have a lesson."

"How, Frances?"

"Meet me again to-morrow and I will by that time have evolved a scheme."

The two friends met again on the following day, and the outcome of that meeting was that, when Edward Saxon went on his visit to his friend, the letter with which we are already acquainted, was written, and Alicia Saxon departed, not to resume her professional career abroad, but to her friend's cottage home in Surrey, where we now find her.

Frances Claridge had seen Edward Saxon's advertisement, but had decided not to show it to her friend, as she deemed it best to carry on the deception long enough to quite shake the would-be brain-specialist out of his selfishness. Hence, she either managed to tear the paper at this particular point, in a seemingly careless way, or she retailed the morning news to her friend, instead of handing her the paper.

For several days the advertisement appeared and then it was withdrawn.

Thus matters had gone on for a fortnight and Alicia was beginning to look very pale and worn. Evidently she was pining for a sight of her husband, and little Gladys' inquiries for "papa" continually loosed the fountains of the mother's tears.

In addition Frances Claridge had seen the doctor in town and had noticed that he was looking far from well.

"Ha! my friend," she muttered, as she observed him from a distance, "there is more heart than brain in your thoughts now."

So she came to the conclusion that it was time to bring the little drama to its last scene.

When she reached the theatre that evening she was greeted with a piece of information that set her capering with delight. Here was just the opportunity for a really dramatic *dénouement*.

The piece which was running was one in which Alicia had formerly sustained one of the principal characters. It had recently been revived, and the news which had so pleased Miss Claridge was this: The lady who was filling Alicia's old *rôle* had met with an accident, necessitating several day's rest.

The understudy would, of course, take the lady's place for that evening, but the lively actress decided that it should not be her fault if Alicia did not resume her old character on the following night.

To think with her was to act, so she at once dashed off to the managerial room. To the presiding genius there, she told sufficient of the story to interest him, and after a little hesitation he complied with her request. His only regret was that he was debarred from posting an announcement on the front of the theatre to the effect that Miss Wentworth would appear, for one night only, in her old part.

Never did a train travel so slowly as the one which bore the fair conspirator to her home that night. When she did eventually alight she traversed the ground between the station and the cottage at a speed very much above the average.

"Alicia," she burst out as soon as she got inside, "I've got such news for you."

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"What is it, dear. Has Ned found me out?"

"Ned, no. Can't you forget that husband of yours sometimes?"

"No, you know I cannot," and Alicia's eyes filled.

"Now I didn't mean to hurt you. If you'll only be a good girl and do as I tell you, you shall be at home to-morrow night."

Alicia brightened at once.

"First of all, you must give me your word to carry out all that I have promised on your behalf."

"You haven't committed me to any impossibilities, I hope?"

"Of course not. Now listen. First I have a confession to make and then a suggestion. The confession is that your husband has been advertising for you," and Frances produced a paper.

Alicia read it and then looked at her friend in reproach.

"Oh, Frances, how could you keep this from me?"

"Because I knew you would have been goose enough to run off at once, and I wanted him to get the lesson thoroughly learnt."

"Now, what is your suggestion?"

Frances explained what she had done.

"But how is that to ensure my going home to-morrow night?"

"Because your worthy husband will be in the stalls. I shall wire Arthur Somerset in the morning to arrange it."

"Edward may be annoyed."

"Rubbish, my dear. He will be only too pleased to see you, judging from what I have heard from time to time. Besides, you have promised."

After some further discussion Alicia consented to go through with the business.

* * * * *

During the course of the following morning Arthur Somerset received a wire, which was worded as follows:

Bring doctor to Comedy to-night, certain.

Arthur Somerset chuckled when he read this. To tell the truth he had been in the plot almost from the very commencement. This had been Frances' suggestion. Knowing of the friendship that existed between the doctor and the detective she had foreseen that Edward Saxon would appeal to Somerset for help, so she had astutely enlisted him as an ally.

The detective strolled round to see his friend during the course of the day, first calling at the theatre to book the seats. On arrival at Belvedere Road he was greeted with the usual inquiry:

"Any news, Somerset?"

The conspirator gravely shook his head.

"Look here, Ned, will you join me at the Comedy to-night?"

"No, I don't care about it."

"I suppose you would rather sit moping here, but you are not going to do it. I have booked the seats, so you may as well come."

"Well, if you must haul me off to a theatre, why select the 'Comedy' of all others. You know it is the thing Alicia used to be in which is running there now."

"Oh! is it?" replied Somerset carelessly. "Well are you going to turn up to-night. If so, I will run round here for you."

"Very well, as you are so persistent."

With this Somerset withdrew.

When he had gone Edward Saxon sat absorbed in thought, and he thought aloud:

"Somerset was unusually lacking in tact and thoughtfulness this morning. Whatever made him suggest that place?"

Then he suddenly started.

"I wonder if he has some object in it," he muttered. The idea grew upon him so strongly that he wired to Somerset.

"Have unexpected engagement to-night. Will join you later at the theatre."

When the shades of evening fell, a closely muffled figure might have been seen standing by the stage-door of the "Comedy." Various members of the company arrived, but not the one Edward Saxon was looking for, and he began to think his idea was a mistaken one.

Just at the last moment a four-wheeler drove up and he drew himself into the shadow to watch the occupants alight. First came Frances Claridge, next his little Gladys, and lastly his wife.

Trembling with excitement he whispered:

"Alicia!"

The ladies turned and Frances jumped forward and caught him by the arm.

"Not here, Mr. Saxon. Come inside with us," she said.

Edward followed, his heart beating tumultuously and his brain in a whirl.

He was quickly put in possession of the facts, and so overjoyed was he at recovering his lost ones that he agreed that Alicia should appear for that one night upon one condition, which was accepted.

This done he left the theatre by the stage-door, entering again in the usual way, all the while smiling to himself at the surprise which was in store for Somerset.

By the time he found the detective he had assumed a more sober expression. Somerset glanced critically at his friend and when the curtain rose Somerset was actually shaking with excitement. He was also anxious as to how Saxon would take his wife's appearance.

At last she came on, resplendent in her robes and looking lovelier than ever.

The detective shot a sharp glance at his friend, which was met by one from Saxon, who remarked, with a smile:

"She looks splendid, doesn't she?"

"What! were you in the plot, too?" interrogated Somerset, with a perplexed look.

"Wait till we get home, and I will explain what I can, and Alicia will fill in the rest."

"Oh, it's like that, is it?"

That night husband, wife and child met under their own roof and they had as guests Miss Claridge and Arthur Somerset.

The next morning the papers in referring to the Comedy had the following as explanation of Mrs. Saxon's appearance, which was the condition the doctor had named:

> The audience at the Comedy last night had the pleasure of renewing their acquaintance with a once great favourite in Mrs. Saxon, better known to playgoers as Miss Alicia Wentworth. Having heard of Miss Madge Anlaby's accident, Mrs. Saxon, with the approval of her husband, generously consented to fill the vacancy. To-night Miss Anlaby will be well enough to resume.

JOHN HENRY PEAT.

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THE LION'S WARS

The Campaign of 1815 Ending with the Battle of Waterloo.

THE retreat of Napoleon from Moscow, in 1812, caused unbounded satisfaction.

The great Powers saw in the destruction of the grand army of France an opportunity of shaking off the yoke of the oppressor.

The Prussians, who had been in a state of subjection since Jena, in 1806, rushed to arms; the Russian army, which had hung in the rear of Napoleon's vast legions, crossed the frontier. Sweden joined the allies, whilst Belgium and Holland looked wistfully at England, who, as usual, opened her purse-strings.

Napoleon fought several battles, but when Austria, after the battle of Bautzen, also joined the allies, the doom of the Corsican was sealed. He gained some victories it is true: Dresden was in his favour, but at Leipsic, where the odds were three to one, he was beaten and compelled to retreat towards France.

Misfortunes then rained thickly on the falling despot. The Bavarians deserted, and the forces of the allies swelled to upwards of a million of men. Then Paris capitulated to avoid being bombarded by an army, which, eluding Napoleon, had invaded France. The Emperor went to Fontainebleau, April 1814, and awaited the decision of the allied sovereigns. It was soon given: abdication and Elba.

On February 15th, 1815, he escaped, landed in France with a few followers, marched through the country without any opposition, and on March 20th made a triumphal entry into Paris.

The allied sovereigns at once met at Vienna, and declared war. Britain at once joined the confederacy, comprising Austria, Russia, and Prussia. Our ministers declared that they would never lay down their arms till Napoleon was conquered, and they kept their word, although the campaign cost us close on £116,000,000.

The prospect of having to fight United Europe did not dismay France.

The remnants of the disbanded armies living in retirement hastened to rejoin their old general. In a few weeks the Emperor had organised a force of 155,000 men fully equipped, and an ample complement of artillery and cavalry.

Great Britain was equally as energetic. A base of operations had been fixed on in Belgium, and troops soon began to pour in to the Low Countries. Wellington, in whom had been invested the command, foresaw that as Napoleon would rely for success upon the rapidity with which he would strike, the slightest delay would be fatal.

On April 4th, 1815, the hero of the Peninsula arrived in Brussels, and at once took over the command. Although by the end of the first week in June the army had increased to 105,000 men with close on 200 guns, it was tainted with one fatal defect. The nationalities composing it were extremely varied, and not quite satisfactory. Wellington would have liked a larger sprinkling of his Peninsula veterans. He was supremely delighted, however, with the British contingent.

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For the rest of the force, save perhaps the troops from Hanover, little could be said. Belgium and Holland had sent a most inferior lot, poorly equipped and officered. The Brunswickers professed to be full of courage but they looked anything but reliable, whilst the Nassauers were not only too old to be described as veterans but so feeble and lacking in spirit that they were soon regarded as an incumbrance. But the greatest defect in the British forces was that as few of the soldiers, save our own, knew anything of Wellington, the vast majority never having heard of his name, he was regarded as a mere baby to Napoleon.

The Prussian army under Blucher was much better circumstanced than our own. The 117,000 men composing it were not only all Prussians but they regarded their commander as quite the equal, if not the superior of the great Napoleon himself.

The force Napoleon collected against Wellington consisted of 89,415 foot, 22,302 cavalry, 15,871 artillery, with 344 guns. On June 15th the two forces came into collision. Arrived at the river Sambro, the French seized the bridges and pushed on towards Frasnes.

Wellington then drew in his scattered forces, and on the 16th had concentrated 30,000 men at Quatre Bras, and the rest round Brussels, which was the object of Napoleon's attack.

After planting a force between the British and Prussians, Napoleon fell on Blucher at Ligny with 75,000 men. The Prussians, who greatly outnumbered the enemy, maintained a dogged fight for over six hours, but as evening approached, the brilliant charges of the French began to tell, and by dusk the Prussians were in full retreat.

Although not routed, Blucher's loss was so heavy—it being close on 20,000 men, that of Napoleon being under 11,000—that although he halted at Wavre, only a few miles in the rear of Ligny, two days elapsed before he was able to move. It was to prevent the British from assisting Blucher that the battle of Quatre Bras was fought.

About an hour before the struggle at Ligny commenced, Marshal Ney attacked the division 7,000 strong under the Prince of Orange with a force of 9,000 men, who was compelled, after Kellermann and a brigade of 2,000 French appeared, to retreat. Picton, who had been giving the veterans of Nassau some exercise, now appeared on the scene, and this so encouraged the Prince that he renewed the battle. But Ney advancing in two solid columns swept all before him until he encountered some regiments of British infantry. The work of checking the rushes of the French was intrusted to Picton, and a couple of brigades supported by the aged warriors from Nassau. Picton was no strategist, but he was an indomitable fighter.

After pouring in several deadly volleys on one of Ney's columns his men charged with such force that the column reeled like a drunken man. Shortly after a very serious incident occurred. The Brunswick division, headed by their Duke (who, to animate his men, puffed at his pipe till he was shot dead), after a vain effort to stop the rushes of General Foys, broke and ran to the wood of Quatre Bras for shelter. The French, carried away by their impetuous charge, came into contact with Picton's brigade, who, after hurling back Ney's column, were resting in a hollow. The French had so seldom been able to score off their old foes that they were greatly elated. The French Lancers on this occasion using their weapons with such skill that in a moment the little valley was like a shambles.

After a grand charge by the whole of the cavalry had been repulsed our guns were pushed forward with deadly effect. Had the messenger Ney dispatched to recall D'Erlon's Corps, which he had sent to the assistance of Napoleon when he thought he should win, not lost his way, Quatre Bras might have ended in a victory for the French. They made a great final effort to turn the tide of battle. Kellermann's Cuirassiers performed prodigies of valour, but their success was quite neutralised by the arrival of the Guards, who carried everything before them.

Our losses were heavy, 4,659 killed and wounded, of which 2,480 were British. The French lost 4,375 killed and wounded.

On the night before the 18th of June the Duke of Wellington and his staff attended a ball given by the Duchess of Richmond. The company which had responded to her Grace's invitation was of the most brilliant description. Such was the splendour of the uniforms that the reception rooms seemed literally ablaze with colour, and all the guests were in the highest spirits.

In the streets the people had collected to watch the sturdy British soldier pouring out of Brussels towards Waterloo, fervently praying for their success.

Wellington then sent word to Blucher that he would accept battle on the plains of Waterloo if Blucher would help him with 25,000 men.

On the night of 17th June the French reached La Belle Alliance, and on the 18th the battle of Waterloo was fought.

Making due allowance for the losses he sustained at Ligny, and the corps, under General Gerard, left at Ligny to keep back Blucher, Napoleon mustered 48,950 infantry, 15,785 cavalry, and 7,232 artillerymen, a total of 71,947 men with 246 guns.

Wellington's army was not quite so large. His infantry numbered 49,608, of whom 24,000 were British and 6,000 Germans. He had 12,402 cavalry, and 5,645 artillerymen with 156 guns. Total 67,655. But of these 18,000 were stationed at Hal, ten miles away, to secure his right flank. But for the strength of his left, which was practically invulnerable owing to the presence of 90,000 Prussians at Wavre, he would have been compelled to retreat on account of the inferiority of his troops in fighting quality like the French.

The field of Waterloo might be described as a shallow valley bounded by low hills. Wellington's right was protected by the valley of Merbe Braine, the left being secured by the hamlets of La Haye Papelotte and Houchain, and at the foot of a slope on the right stood the celebrated chateau and grounds of Hougoumont extending half a mile into the plain, occupied by our troops.

Both armies were drawn up in three lines. Napoleon's disposition differed slightly from those of his great rival, who stationed the greater part of his cavalry on his wings, whilst Napoleon's were scattered behind his infantry lines. Napoleon's seemingly was the better plan as his cavalry was at hand to support an attack from any quarter.

As soon as the battle commenced Napoleon stationed himself on an eminence near the farm-house La Belle Alliance. There he remained for the greater part of the day impassively watching the progress of the great struggle till the tide of battle began to flow against him. Then he showed how deeply he was stirred by moving nearer and nearer to the fight. At 3 p.m. he mounted his horse, and when the time arrived

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Drawn by] [*C. Lawson Wood.*

As soon as the battle commenced Napoleon stationed himself on an eminence near the farmhouse La Belle Alliance.

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for the Imperial Guard to make their effort he was close to the farm called La Haye Sainte.

Napoleon's plan of battle was worthy of his great genius. He saw with true instinct that Wellington's left and left centre were his weak points, so after a strong demonstration on the right he made a determined attack on the left. But his scheme was imperfectly carried out. The French carried a portion of Hougoumont, but the desperate valour of our soldiers resisted all attempts to quite dislodge them. Two divisions were sent against them but our wonderful infantry fought as if rooted to the ground. The attack and defence of Hougoumont cost 6,000 lives.

Then the attack shifted and Napoleon, after a terrible cannonade, directed the whole of D'Erlon's corps and a large body of horse against the left. But the onslaught was splendidly repulsed by our infantry, and on their retreat our heavy cavalry rode clear through the columns of the French, and taking them in flank drove them on the enemy's right.

Then a new enemy made its presence known. The vanguard of Bulow's corps was descried far off on the right. This ominous column compelled Napoleon to detach the corps of Laban to prevent their advancing. Naturally, the absence of these men greatly disconcerted Napoleon's plans. Napoleon now resolved to concentrate his attacks on Wellington's centre alone. After a severe struggle the post of La Haye Sainte was won by the French. This success uncovered part of Wellington's line and enabled dense masses of cavalry to mount the slopes in front of the Duke's position. When the cavalry were followed by clouds of skirmishers victory for France appeared certain, especially as our foreign allies began to betray signs of trepidation.

Still the issue depended on Napoleon being able to force back our centre and roll it up, quickly too, for a Prussian prisoner had informed him that instead of being crushed and broken, the whole of Blucher's army was marching against the Emperor's right flank.

But it was to be no sudden rout, if rout at all, for our admirable infantry, forming into squares, resisted every attempt to overwhelm them. As a French historian said, "they seemed glued to their places."

What was to be done? It was now past noon and Napoleon, realising that the moment for a supreme effort had arrived, gave the signal for Ney to make an instant assault. Placing himself at the head of a body of infantry comprising 18,000 men, and moving in four compact columns, Ney strove to retrieve the day at La Haye Sainte, from which they had retreated. Our allies, retreating with great precipitation, were driven against the British left centre with a force so great that any other troops but ours would have lost confidence.

Bringing forward two brigades, scarcely 3,000 strong, Sir Thomas Picton waited till the French reached the crest of the hill only thirty yards away and then gave the command, "a volley and then charge." The moment the smoke cleared the British, after a loud hurrah, charged the huge column confronting them.

Our ranks thinned terribly during this charge. The fate of Europe literally hung in the balance. The noble Picton fell shot through the brain.

His men saw him fall, and with cries of rage increased their pace. At last the intervening ground was covered, and the moment so longed for had arrived.

We had been on the defensive all day. It was now our turn to strike, and strike hard the British infantry did. A terrible shock, and then the French column reeled. Before they could recover, Kempt's brigade struck them heavily on the flank, hurling them down the hill up which a few minutes before they had so proudly mounted.

Ponsonby's Union Horse, like the infantry, had been chafing all day, but the moment Kempt's men had delivered their blow, they burst on the retreating French, cutting them down by hundreds. In this one charge, 3,000 prisoners and two eagles were captured.

Elated with their success, these brave horsemen next rode straight at Ney's guns, paralysing the gunners and cutting them down to a man. They had halted to reform, when Ney's cavalry rode down on them. One of the most terrible fights of the war now took place. The opposing horsemen neither asked nor gave quarter. We were gradually getting the upper hand, when the fate of Ney's horse was settled by a charge of Vandaleurs dragoons which annihilated them.

Napoleon's chances of winning were now growing very faint. Still Wellington's prudence never deserted him. So heavy had his losses been, that to strengthen the weak centre, he drew the remainder of his army closer together, and to prevent the Belgians and others of the allies from running away, he placed them alongside our men. Born strategist that he was, he knew that Napoleon would not quit the field without making a last final effort. And this was true. Bombarding Hougoumont heavily to induce the belief that an attack would follow, the Imperial Guard were hurled against La Haye Sainte, the garrison of which, under Major Baring, had been reduced to 500 men.

Overwhelmed by numbers, with little ammunition which soon ran out, with no chance of reinforcements, Baring held out till nearly all his men were killed and then capitulated. It was the only gleam of success the French had that day. At 5 p.m. the Imperial Guard and its cavalry, 5,000 splendidly attired troopers, were led by Ney against the British squares. Brave as lions these devoted men, the finest soldiers of France, charged them with irresistible fury. But, formidable as their rushes were, they could not shake the stern determination of Britain's devoted soldiers not to budge an inch till the Prussians came up. Four charges and the French recoiled like surf from the storm-beaten rock.

One more charge. Their cavalry, headed by Ney, got within twenty yards and then as if by magic the rush was stayed and as volley after volley rang out horses and riders fell in hundreds. They came again; indeed after our ammunition gave out they charged the squares a score of times, but try as they might they could not pass those barriers of steel. At 6.30 p.m. Bulow's corps of 20,000 men arrived. Napoleon reinforced Laban with 4,000 of his guard to check the advance. If he could only keep them back half-an-hour, he said to his staff.

A tremendous cannonade compelled our men to lie down. Then up came the French. Where was the British army. "Up Guards and make ready." First a volley then a charge. When the smoke cleared, the veterans of France were being pursued by the boys of England.

A signal which was quickly passed, and then the whole British army plunged furiously forward crushing all opposition. Hurled upon the Prussians the French recoiled, and took to flight. The carnage was dreadful. In killed, wounded and missing, the French lost 25,000 men. The losses of the allies were 14,728.

[NEXT WEEK: **The War with the Ghurkas, the Pindaris, and the last Mahratta War (1813-1817).**]

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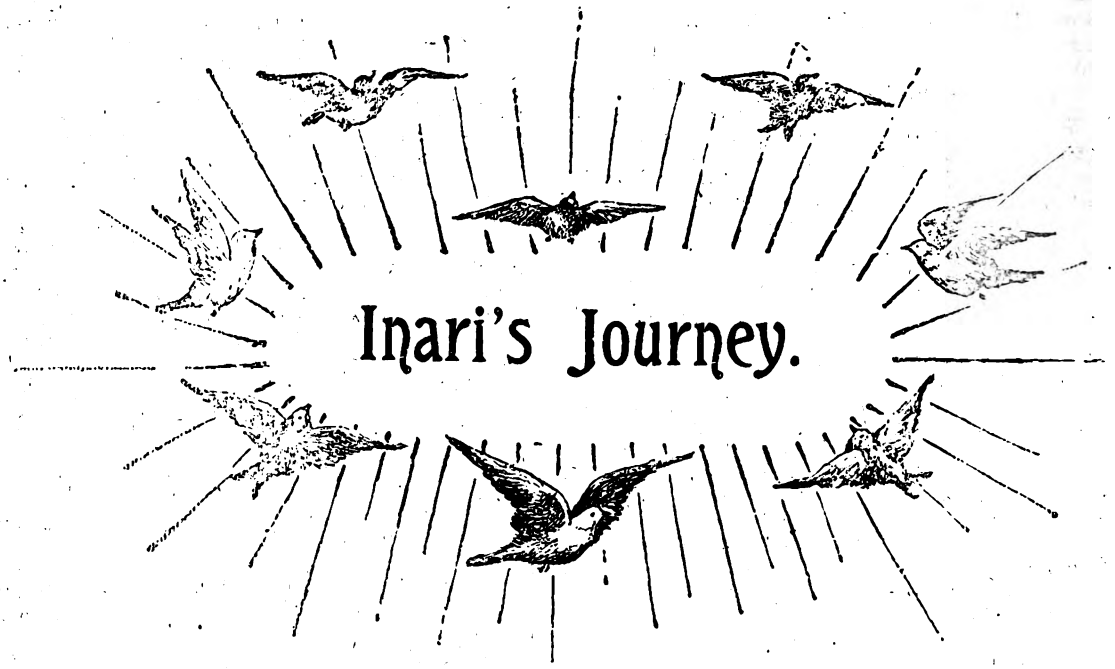

Inari's Journey.

THE great fox-god, Inari, once determined that he would make a journey through the city to find out where true honesty and goodness existed. It was a bad age of crime and corruption.

Civil wars tore the heart of the fair island; the rich plundered the poor; the poor could get neither justice nor reparation; men's minds were aflame with avarice, and the sun shone upon as foul a scene of depravity as it had ever seen since the days of the fifth great deluge.

The first place that Inari visited was the counting-house of one of the greatest merchants of the city of Yeddo.

"At any rate," he said, "I shall find fair dealing and honesty here, for this man's junks float on a hundred waters, his word is as good as a bond, and his name is a byeword for uprightness and integrity."

He took up his position in the shape of a cobweb in a corner of the sample room. The tide of customers and merchants flowed in and out; the money rattled into the coffers; the clerks were busy with pen and scroll; but no one saw what Inari saw.

His heart smote him to see the tricks of trade, and the deceptions practised. The chests were filled with coloured leaves and dust sweepings, the bales of silk were weighted with false materials, and their contents dyed with false colours; lacquer and bronze manufactured in the next street were sold as the veritable productions of old times; the very scales used were false, and the stories told to the customers were false.

The next day the whole city was thrown into a state of consternation at the news that the great firm had failed, and that the head partner had gone away, no one knew whither.

The next journey of the god was to the "yashiki," or palace of the great lord of Bizen, one of the haughtiest and proudest of the nobles of the empire. As he seated himself in the guise of a fly on the top of a sword rack in the banqueting chamber he said: "He is too great to be ambitious, he is too rich to be avaricious, he has too great expenses to be extravagant, he has nothing to scheme for, his fame is too bright for him to dare to sully it by dishonesty, he is too familiar with pleasure to be vicious."

The banquet was spread, and the great lord entered in gorgeous apparel. The sweets, with which the meal commenced, were served in dishes of the purest Nagasaki porcelain, the rice was in the finest of old gold lacquer, the wine—that prince of wines, the "Flower in full bloom"—hissed and bubbled in vases of the choicest Bizen ware, whilst the rarest of fish and fowl came up in the quaint dishes brought from China. Merrily the feast proceeded, the wine-cup circled incessantly, cheeks grew flushed, eyes began to sparkle and tongues wagged fast. There was nothing in this with which Inari could find fault, for the prince was wealthy, and it became his dignity to keep a sumptuous table, but he was annoyed and disgusted to observe with what brutality the prince treated his wife, a poor, modest, retiring creature whose only fault seemed to be that she brooked her husband's insolence too meekly.

If she spoke Bizen answered her roughly; if she smiled he frowned, and the poor woman knew not which way to look or how to behave.

When the dancing girls were ushered in, a retainer, humbly prostrating himself as he crawled along the floor, brought the prince a note.

Inari, who of course could see through rough walls, doors, and everything, espied a poor ragged man, evidently half-dead with cold and hunger, sitting in the snow outside.

"Now," said the god to himself, "I shall see the true nature of the prince."

When Bizen opened the note his face grew purple with passion, his brow was puckered into a network of frowns, and his hand stretched to his sword—an act at table which is only tolerated under the most exceptional circumstances.

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When Bizen had so far collected himself to be able to speak, he roared:

"What does the scamp mean by intruding upon my privacy with his beggarly petitions? Who let him in at the great gate?"

"What is it?" asked his wife cautiously.

The prince turned on her like a wild animal.

"What is it, madam?" he hissed. "Why, it's a letter from an impostor who declares that I have ruined him by forfeiting his tenure last summer; he says he is starving, and has the unheard-of insolence to ask me for the loan of a hundred riyos."

"You can afford to let him have them, can you not?" meekly asked his wife, "so I will go and give them to him."

The prince raised his hand and struck the unhappy woman to the ground.

Inari could stay no longer. Outside, where cowered the beggar, he assumed the guise of a retainer.

"Where do you live?" he asked the poor man.

"At Kawasaki, your noble honour," replied the man, trembling with terror, "and I have walked here through snow some fourteen miles to ask his highness for help, for I am very poor and miserable, and through no fault of my own."

"Are you honest?" asked Inari.

"I try to be, your honour," answered the poor fellow.

"I can easily find out," said the god, "so do not deceive me."

The beggar looked at him.

Inari placed his hand on the man's sleeve and disappeared. The beggar, bewildered, looked around, then felt in his sleeve and pulled out notes to the value of 500 riyos. Then he fell on his knees and cried, "It is the worshipful Inari himself," and went on his way rejoicing.

The next day the Prince of Bizen was murdered, and his palace burnt to the ground by a mob of discontented tenants.

The next journey of Inari was to a hall of justice. "If I don't find honesty here," he said, "I don't know where to look for it."

The day's business began, and Inari took the form of a pen in the hand of one of the clerks.

"Call the first case," said the judge, a big, heavy fellow, with a face which betokened constant acquaintance with the good things of this life.

The first criminal was introduced; he was carried in, for he had lain five days in a noisome cell with weights upon his back and legs, and could not move.

"You are accused of robbery," said the judge.

"Nay, your honour," whispered the poor wretch, "I was starving. I saw a rice cake on a shop shelf, and I could not resist the temptation to seize it."

"Doesn't matter. It's robbery," said the judge. "People's property must be protected. Fifty stripes with the bamboo, a month's hard labour upon rice and water, and think yourself lucky to get off with your head. Next case."

A dissolute-looking young fellow, fashionably dressed, swaggered in between two gaolers.

"Sorry to see you here Mr. Hanaski," said the judge blandly. "Same as before, I suppose?"

"Well, sir," replied the young man, with an air of careless effrontery, "it was at the 'Three Pine Trees'; I suppose I had been drinking a bit; the wench was impudent, and I cut her down. I suppose a couple of hundred riyos for the family will settle it?"

"Oh, as it was justifiable," said the judge, "we'll have it a hundred. Good morning."

The young man paid the money and left the court.

Inari shuddered.

"Here," thought he, "is a poor wretch who is convicted of having stolen a cake worth half-a-tempo to appease the cravings of his hunger, and is condemned to be crippled for life; and a young blackguard who kills a woman gets off with an easy fine!"

On the spot he struck the judge with a dropsy, from which he never recovered; and the young murderer was waylaid by the friends of the girl, and so maltreated that he died of his wounds.

Heart-sick and mortified, Inari said:

"Now for Kawasaki. Possibly, but not probably, I shall find beneath the lowly peasant's roof what I have failed to discover in the gilded palaces of the mighty."

To Kawasaki he went as a pilgrim. He soon espied the beggar cutting wood outside a poor but neat little hut hard by the ferry.

Assuming an air of great weariness the god addressed him:

"I am bound for the holy O Yama, to do my mid-winter penance beneath the cascade at Koyais. I am very poor, and cannot afford to go to one of the great tea-houses; perhaps you will let me rest here and refresh myself, in return for what few tempos I can give."

The peasant took Inari's arm and gently led him in.

"O Kiku," he cried to his wife, "here quick bring some warm water, and something to eat and drink; here is a poor old pilgrim tired and hungry."

A pleasant-looking old woman approached at the summons and saluted Inari. Then the warm water was brought and she bathed the feet of the god, whilst her husband scraped together what little food and wine there was in the house, and set it before him.

"I feel ashamed," said Inari, "at trespassing on the good nature of those who are as poor as myself."

"Do not mention it, sir," said the peasant. "We have to work hard for our living, but we have always something to spare for poor travellers like yourself."

"And how do you get your living, if it is not a rude question?" asked Inari.

"I cut for the great tea-houses," replied the man, "and at busy times I help the ferry man. But I had such great good luck the other day that we are quite comfortable now." And he told Inari about his visit to the Bizen palace.

The god said nothing for a few minutes, and then he asked: "I shall be returning here in a fortnight's time; could you make it convenient to lend me fifty riyos?"

"Willingly, sir," said the peasant, and he counted out the sum from his bamboo stem and placed the paper in the hand of the god.

In a fortnight Inari returned to the peasant's house and said:

"Here are the fifty riyos you were kind enough to lend me, and," taking from his own pocket a roll of notes, "here are five hundred more. I only borrowed from you to test your heart, and perhaps you can guess who I am."

The astonished and delighted couple fell on their knees, in an ecstacy of joy.

Inari disappeared, and the poor peasant prospered ever after, until he became owner of the largest tea-house in Kawasaki.

FRANK ABELL.

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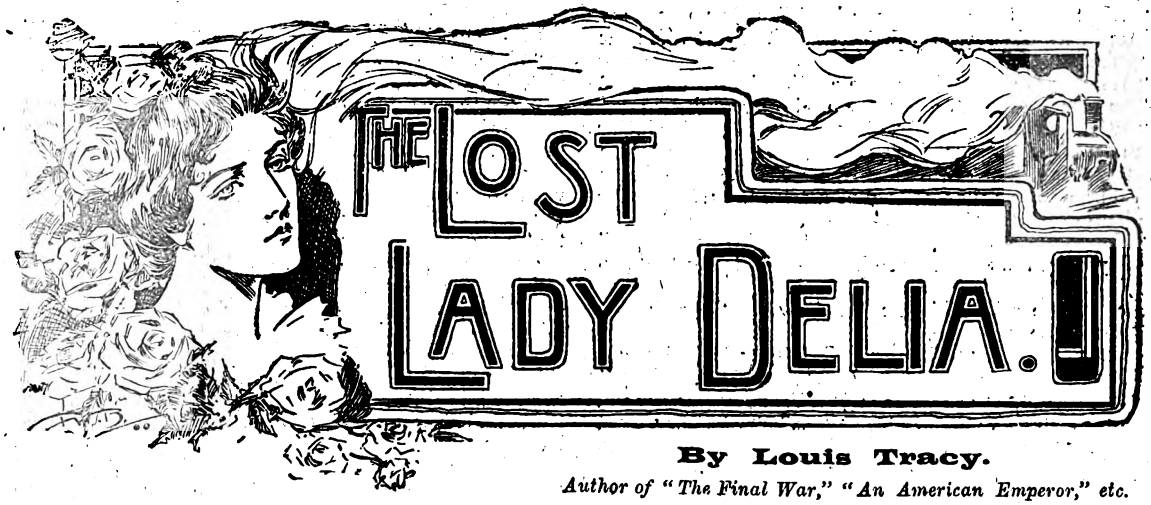

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

SUMMARY.

Lady Delia Lyle leaves her house one foggy November afternoon, and is seen at Victoria Station, on the Underground Railway, by Mr. Reginald Brett, a barrister friend of her husband, who gets her ticket and puts her in the train for Richmond, where she says she is going to see her sister, but from that time she is not heard of.

After some days have passed, without bringing any news of Lady Delia, her husband, Sir Charles Lyle, puts the matter into the hands of detectives, Inspector Winter taking charge of the case.

Brett also promises to do all he can, and he finds out that Lady Delia, on the night of her disappearance, instead of going to Richmond, alighted at Sloane Square, and went to a block of flats called Raleigh Mansions.

Towards the end of the month the body of a woman, evidently murdered, is found wedged beneath a drain-pipe in the Thames at Putney, and, though Sir Charles does not identify the body, Brett imagines it to be that of Lady Delia. Shortly after this discovery Lady Delia's maid, Jane Harding, disappears. She is afterwards found to have gone on the stage.

Brett now starts investigations at Raleigh Mansions, and he fixes on two residents there as being likely to have been connected with Lady Delia. These are a Mr. Sydney H. Pyne, who is not at present in residence, and a Mrs. Hilmer, whom he finds to be Pyne's sister.

It had transpired that Pyne had gone to Monte Carlo, and thither Brett goes, and he discovers that though letters are addressed to Pyne at the Hotel du Cercle, he is not known there.

During his stay at Monte Carlo Brett becomes acquainted with an Englishman, named Albert Mensmore, whom he helps out of some money difficulties, but he does not discover anything about Pyne.

CHAPTER XI.

Theories.

Brett announced his departure from Monte Carlo by a telegram to his valet.

Nevertheless, he did not expect to find that useful adjunct to his small household—Smith and his wife comprised the barrister's ménage—standing on the platform at Charing Cross when the evening mail from the Continent steamed into the station.

Smith, who had his doubts about this sudden trip to the Riviera, was relieved when he saw that his master was alone. "Sir Charles Lyle called this afternoon, sir," he explained. "I told Sir Charles about your wire, sir, and he is very anxious that you should dine with him to night. You can dress at Portman Square, and if I come with you——"

"Yes; I understand. Bundle everything into a four-wheeler."

"Sir Charles thought you might come, sir, so he has sent his carriage."

London looked dull but familiar as they rolled across Leicester Square and up Regent Street. Your true Cockney knows that he is out of his latitude when the sky is blue overhead. Let him hear the tinkle of the hansoms' bells through a dim, fog-laden atmosphere, and he knows where he is. There is but one London, and Cockneydom is the order of Melchisedek. Brett's heart was glad within him to be home again, even though the band was just at that hour gathering in the Casino gardens, and the lights of Monaco were beginning to gleam over the expanse of the Mediterranean.

At Wensley House the traveller was warmly welcomed by the baronet, who seemed to have somewhat recovered his health and spirits.

It was not until dinner had ended that Brett was clearly able to note the ineffaceable signs of the suffering Sir Charles Lyle had undergone since the disappearance of his wife. He had aged quite ten years in appearance. Deep lines of sorrowful thought had indented his brow, his face was thinner, and had acquired a wistful look; his air was that of a man whose theory of life had been forcibly reversed.

At first both men fought shy of the topic of Lady Delia, but the after-dinner cigar brought the question to Lyle's lips:

"And now, Brett, have you any further news concerning my wife's—death?"

The barrister noticed the struggle before the final word came. The husband had, then, resigned all hope.

"I have none," he answered. "That is to say, I have nothing definite. I promised to tell you everything I did, so I will keep my promise, but you will, of course, differentiate between facts and theories?"

The baronet nodded an agreement.

"In the first place," said Brett, "let me ask you whether or not you have seen Jane Harding, the missing maid?"

"Yes. It seems that she called here twice, before she caught me at home. At first she was very angry about a squabble there had been between Thompson and herself. I refused to listen to it. Then she told me how you had found her at some theatre, and she volunteered an explanation of her extraordinary behaviour. She said that she had unexpectedly come into a large sum of money, and that it had turned her head. She was sorry for the trouble her actions had caused, so, under the circumstances, I allowed her to take away certain clothes and other belongings she had left here."

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"Did she ask for these things?"

"Yes. Made quite a point of it."

"Did you see them?"

"No."

"So you do not know whether they were of any value, or the usual collection of rubbish found in servant's boxes."

"I have not the slightest notion."

"Have they ever been thoroughly examined by any one?"

"'Pon my honour, I believe not. Now that you remind me of it I think the girl seemed rather anxious on that point. I remember my housekeeper telling me that Harding asked her if her clothes had been ransacked by detectives."

"And what did the housekeeper say?"

"She will tell you herself. Let us have her up."

"Don't trouble her. If I remember aright the police did not examine Jane Harding's room. They simply took your report and the statements of the other servants, whilst the housekeeper was responsible for the partial search made through the girl's boxes for some clue that might lead to her discovery."

"That is so."

The barrister smoked in silence for a few minutes until Sir Charles broke out rather querulously.

"I suppose I did wrong in letting Harding take away her traps?"

"No," said Brett. "It is I who am to blame. There is something underhand about this young woman's conduct. The story about the sudden wealth is all bunkum, in one sense. That she did receive a bequest or gift of a considerable sum cannot be doubted. That she at once decided to go on the stage is obvious. But what is the usual course for a servant to pursue in such cases? Would she not have first sought to glorify herself in the sight of her fellow-servants, and even of her employers? Would there not have been the display of a splendid departure—in a hansom—with voluble directions to the driver, for the benefit of the footman? As it was, Jane Harding acted suddenly, precipitately, under the stress of some powerful emotion. I cannot help believing that her departure from this house had some connection, however remote, with Lady Delia's disappearance."

"Good Heavens, Brett, you never told me this before."

"True, but when we last met I had not the pleasure of Miss Marie le Marchant's acquaintance. I wish to goodness I had rummaged her boxes before she carried them off."

"And I sincerely echo your wish," said Sir Charles testily, "It always seems, somehow, that I am to blame."

"You must not take that view. I really wonder, Lyle, that you have not closed up your town house and gone off to Scotland for the fag-end of the shooting season. You won't hunt, I know, but a quiet life on the moors would bring you right away from associations which must have bitter memories for you."

"I would have done so, but I cannot tear myself away whilst there is the slightest chance of the mystery attending my wife's fate being unravelled. I feel that I must remain here, near you. You are the only man who can solve the riddle, if ever it be solved. By the way, what of Raleigh Mansions?"

The baronet obviously nerved himself to ask the question. The reason was patent. The inexplicable visit of Lady Delia to that locality was in some way connected with her fate, and the commonsense view was that some intrigue lay hidden behind the present impenetrable wall of ignorance that shrouded her final movements.

Brett hesitated for a moment. Was there any need to bring Mrs. Hillmer's name into the business? At any rate, he could fully answer Sir Charles without mentioning her at this juncture.

"The only person in Raleigh Mansions who interests me just now is one who, to use a convenient bull, is not there."

"Yes?"

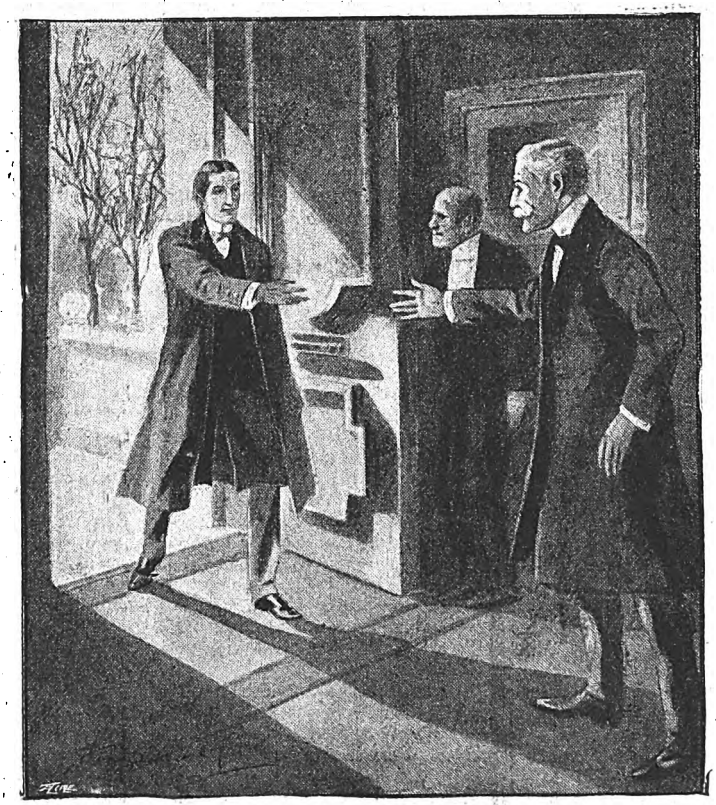
"This person occupies a flat in No. 12, his name is Sydney H. Pyne, and he left his residence for the Riviera two days after your wife was lost."

"Now, who on earth can *he* be? I am as sure as a man may be of anything that no one of that name was in the remotest way connected with either my wife or myself for the last—let me see—six years, at any rate."

"Possibly. But you cannot say that Lady Delia may not have met him previously?"

The baronet winced at the illusion as though a whip had struck him. "For Heaven's sake, Brett," he cried, "do not harbour suspicions against my wife. I cannot bear it. I tell you my whole soul revolts at the idea. I would rather be suspected of having killed her myself than listen to a word whispered against her good name."

"I sympathise with you, but you must not jump at me in that fashion. One hypothesis is as wildly impossible as the other. I did not say that Lady Delia went to Raleigh Mansions on account of some present or bygone transgression of her own. I would as soon think of my mother



At Wensley House the traveller was warmly welcomed by the baronet.

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"You didn't know, Brett," he said, "that you vividly described the attempted self-murder of a man I know intimately."

in such a connection. But a pure, good woman will often do on behalf of others what she will not do for herself. Really, Lyle, you must not be unjust to me, especially when you force me to tell you what may prove to be mere theories."

"Others? What others?"

"I cannot say. I wish I could. If I once lay hold of the reason that brought Lady Delia to Raleigh Mansions I will, within twenty-four hours, tell you who murdered her. Of that I am as certain as that the sun will rise to-morrow."

And the barrister poked the fire viciously to give vent to the annoyance that his friend's outburst had provoked.

"Pardon me, Brett. Do not forget how I have suffered—what I am suffering—and try to bear with me. I never valued my wife while she lived. It is only now that I feel the extent of my loss. If my own life would only restore her to me for an instant I would cheerfully give it."

If ever man meant his words Sir Charles Lyle did. His agitation moved the kindly-hearted barrister to rise and place a gentle hand on his shoulder.

"I am sorry, Lyle," he said, "that the conversation has taken this turn. These speculative guesses at potential clues distress you. If you took my advice you would not worry about events until at least something tangible turns up."

"Perhaps it is best so," murmured the other. "In any event, it is of little consequence. I cannot live long."

"Oh, nonsense. You are good for another fifty years. Come, shake off this absurd depression You can do no good by it. I wish now I had taken you with me to Monte Carlo. The fresh air would have braced you up whilst I hunted for Fyne."

"Did you find him?"

"No, but I dropped in for an adventure that would cheer the soul of any depressed author searching vainly for an idea for a short story."

"What was it?"

Reggie, who possessed no mean skill as a raconteur, gave him the history of the Casino incident, and the thrilling denouement so interested the baronet that he lit another cigar.

"Did you ascertain the names of the parties?" he said.

"Oh, yes. You will respect their identity, as the sensational side of the affair had better now be buried in oblivion, though, of course, all the world knows about the way we scooped the bank. The lady is a daughter of Sir William Browne, a worthy knight from Warwickshire, and her rather vapid swain is a youngster named Mensmore."

"Mensmore!" shouted the baronet. "A youngster you say," and Sir Charles bounced upright in his excitement.

"Why, yes, a man of twenty-five. Not more than twenty-eight, I can swear. Do you know him?"

"Albert Mensmore?"

"That's the man beyond doubt."

Lyle hastily poured out some whisky and water and swallowed it. Then he spoke, with a faint smile: "You didn't know, Brett," he said, "that you vividly described the attempted self-murder of a man I know intimately."

"What an extraordinary thing! Yet I never remember hearing you mention his name."

"Probably not. I have hardly seen him since my marriage. We were schoolboys together, though as I was much his senior we did not chum together until later when we met a good deal on the Turf. Then he went off roughing it in the States. It must be he. It is just one of his mad pranks. And he is going to marry, eh? Is she a nice girl?"

The baronet was thoroughly excited. He talked fast, and helped himself liberally to stimulants.

"Yes, unusually so. But I cannot help marvelling at this odd coincidence. It has upset you."

"Not a bit. I was interested in your yarn, but naturally I was unprepared for the startling fact that an old friend of my own filled the chief part. What a fellow you are, Reggie, for always turning up at the right time. I have never been in a tight place personally, but if I were I suppose you would come along and show me the way out. Sit down again and give me all the details. I am full of curiosity."

Brett had never before seen Sir Charles in such hysterical mood. The anguish of the past three months had changed the careless, jovial baronet into a fretful, wayward being, who had lost control of his emotions. Undoubtedly he required some powerful tonic. The barrister resolved to see more of him in the near future, and not to cease urging until he had started on a long sea voyage, or taken up some hobby that would keep his mind from brooding upon the everlasting topic of Lady Delia's strange death.

Lyle's fitful disposition manifested itself later. After he had listened with keen attention to all that Brett had to

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tell him concerning Mensmore and Phyllis Browne, he suddenly swerved back to the one engrossing thought.

"What are you going to do about Pyne?" he asked.

"Find him."

"But how?"

"People are always tied to a centre by a string, and no matter how long the string may be, it contracts sooner or later. Pyne will turn up at Raleigh Mansions, and before very many weeks have passed, if I mistake not."

"And then?"

"Then he will have to answer me a few pertinent questions."

"But suppose he knows nothing whatever about the business?"

"In that case I must confess that the clue is more tangled than ever."

"It would be curious if Pyne and Jane Harding were in any way associated."

"If they were, it would take much to convince me that one or both could not supply at least some important information bearing on my—on our quest. If Mr. Winter even knew as much as I do about them he would arrest them at sight."

"Oh, he's a thick-headed chap is Winter. By the way, that reminds me. He got hold of the maid, it seems, before she bolted, and made her give him some of my wife's clothes. By that means he established some sort of theory about——"

"About a matter on which we differ," put in Brett, quietly. "Let us talk of something else."

Lyle moved restlessly in his chair, but yielded. For the remainder of the evening they discussed questions irrelevant to the course of this narrative.

It was late when they separated, but Brett found Smith sitting up for him at home.

That faithful servitor bustled about, stirring the fire and turning on the lights. Finally he nervously addressed his master:

"Pardon me, sir, but there was a policeman here asking about you to-night, sir."

"A policeman!"

"Well, sir, a detective, Mr. Winter, of Scotland Yard. I knew him, sir, though he didn't think it. He came about ten o'clock, and asked if you was at home and where you were."

"Did you tell him?"

"Well, sir," and Smith shifted from one foot to the other, "I thought it best to let him know the truth, sir."

"Good gracious, Smith, he is not going to handcuff me. You did quite right. What did he say?"

"Nothing, sir; except that he would call again. He wouldn't leave his name, but I know'd him all right."

"Thank you. Good night. It was unnecessary that you should have remained up. But I am obliged to you all the same."

The barrister laughed as he went to his room. "Really," he said to himself, still highly amused, "Winter will cap all his previous feats by trying to arrest me. I expect he has thought of it for a long time."

And Mr. Winter *had* thought of it.

CHAPTER XII.

WHO PYNE WAS.

"INEXORABLE Fate" is a favourite phrase with the makers of books; but Fate, being feminine according to the best authorities, is also somewhat fickle in disposition. Not only is she not invariably inexorable, but at times she delights to play with her poor subjects, to dazzle them with surprise, as it were, to stupefy them with the sense of their sheer inability to foresee her vagaries.

It was Brett's turn to receive the sharpest lesson in this respect that he ever remembered.

At breakfast the following morning he picked out from a packet of unimportant letters one which required immediate attention. The financial agents to whom he had written in conformity with his implied promise to Mr. Dodge had replied favourably with reference to the re-construction scheme of the Springbok Mine.

They informed Brett confidentially that a thoroughly reliable man in Johannesburg, to whom they had cabled, reported very strongly in favour of the property. They would await his written statement before finally committing themselves. Meanwhile, if Messrs. Dodge, Son, and Co. (Limited) were anxious to get the business advanced a stage, there was no reason why he (Brett) should not see this firm of brokers and assure them that, subject to the first satisfactory report being confirmed, his clients would underwrite the shares. The whole thing would thus go through in about three weeks. As for Brett himself, they proposed to give him a commission of five per cent. in fully-paid shares for the introduction.

"Well, I never!" laughed Brett. "Now who would have thought such a thing possible? Why, if that rascal Dodge is right and this company is really a sound undertaking, my

"Pardon me, sir, but there was a policeman here asking about you to-night, sir."

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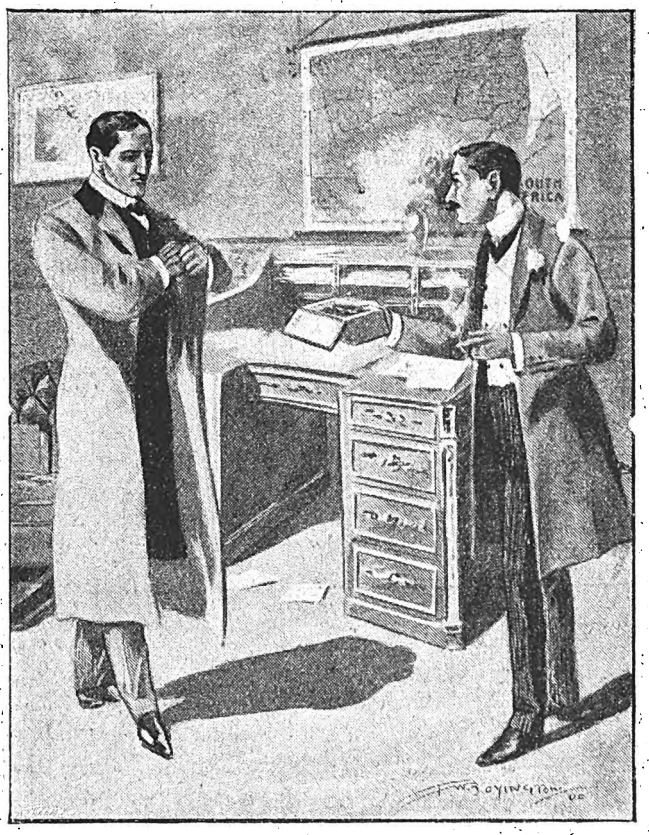

"How stupid of me. I have forgotten my morning smoke. May I light a cigar?"

share of the deal will be £10,000. It seems wildly incredible, yet my friends know what they are writing about as a rule."

An hour later he was in the City.

A smart brougham stood in front of the now thoroughly renovated offices of "Dodge, Son, and Co. (Limited)," and out of it, at the moment the barrister detached himself from the chaos of Leadenhall Street, stepped the head of the firm.

Oblivious of Brett's presence, he was making up the steps when Reggie cried:

"Hullo, Mr. Dodge, how is the junior partner?"

Dodge stopped, focussed Brett with his sharp eyes, and smiled:

"Oh, it is you, is it? The young 'un is all right, thanks. Are you coming in?"

"That was my intention."

"Come along then. I was hoping I should see you again one of these days."

"Has business improved recently?" said Brett, as they entered the inner office.

"Yes, somewhat; but money is very tight still. However, we generally look for a spurt early in the New Year. Why do you ask?"

"No valid reason. A mere hazard."

"Was it because you saw me drive up in a carriage?"

"Mr. Dodge, I never dreamt that self-consciousness was a failing of members of the Stock Exchange."

"Then that *was* the cause. I guessed it. I have been making inquiries about you, Mr. Brett, and there is no use in trying to fool you, not a bit."

"Have you another Springbok proposition on hand?"

"No, bar chaffing. You were the man who ferreted out the truth about that West Australian combination when everybody else had failed. And, now I think of it, you made me talk a lot the last time you were here. However, I am ready. Fire away! I will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me——"

"Sh—s—sh! Do not perjure yourself for the sake of alliteration. Besides, it is I who have come to talk this time."

"About Springboks?"

"Yes. The people I mentioned to you at my previous visit are prepared to underwrite the shares, provided that their agent's report is as favourable in its entirety as a telegraphic summary leads them to believe."

"Eh? That's good news! When will they be in a position to complete?"

"As soon as they hear from South Africa by post. Say, three weeks."

"So long! But suppose I get an offer from some other quarter in the meantime? I cannot keep the proposal open indefinitely."

"I have not asked you to do so, Mr. Dodge. Let me see—3s. per share on, say, two hundred thousand shares is £30,000. It is a good deal of money. If anyone likes to hand you a cheque for that amount without preliminary investigation, take it by all means."

The notion tickled Dodge immensely.

"All right, Mr. Brett. When people of that sort turn up we don't sell 'em Springboks in the City. But there is no harm in your telling me your clients' names."

"Not in the least. They are the Anglo-African Finance Corporation."

Mr. Dodge whistled. "By Jove, they're the best backing I could have. This is a good turn, Mr. Brett, and I sha'n't forget it. You see we're a young firm, and association with well-known houses is good for us in every sense. I'm jolly glad now that Springboks are all right. It would never have done for me to introduce them to a risky piece of business. I am really very much obliged to you. And now, how do we stand?"

"Kindly explain."

"How much 'com.' do you want?"

"Nothing."

Mr. Dodge moved his chair backwards for several feet in sheer amazement. "Nothing, my dear sir! Nonsense. It is a big affair. Shall we say one per cent. in cash, or two in shares. I am not very well off just now, or——"

"Pray don't trouble yourself. I have already got my commission—five per cent. in fully-paid shares."

"But the people who put up the money don't pay for the privilege as a rule!"

"That I know quite well. This case is different. I am not, nor ever have been, a financial go-between."

"Didn't you come to see me about the deal in the first instance?"

It was Brett's turn to hesitate.

"Not exactly," he said. "I really wanted to know something about Mr. Pyne, and the Springbok business arose out of it."

"Ah, that chap Pyne. I have been thinking about him. I wonder who he can be? Anyhow, I owe him my best wishes, as the mention of his name has had such excellent results."

"Well, that is all," said Brett rising.

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"Yes, thanks. I must now see about raising the money to pay my own call. I am interested in 50,000 shares, you know."

"Then you require some £7,500."

"Yes. But that will be easy when I can say that the Anglo-African Finance people are with me. Besides, I have this morning—queer you should call immediately afterwards—had some wholly unexpected good news."

"Indeed?" Mr. Dodge was in a talkative vein, and Brett was in no hurry.

"The very best!" went on Dodge gleefully. "You see, there is another man in this affair with me. I thought he was as stony-broke as I was myself—speaking confidentially, you know—when he suddenly writes to me saying that he had won a pot of money at Monte Carlo and could spare me £2,000. What's the matter? Beastly trying weather, isn't it? Try a nip of brandy."

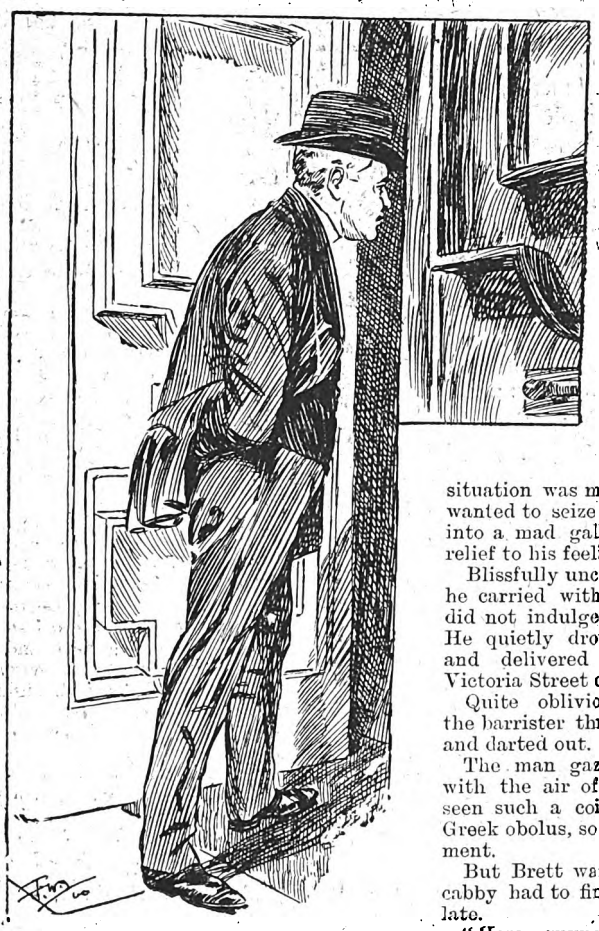
For once in his life the self-possessed barrister had blanched at a sudden revelation. But this was too much. He felt as though a meteorite had fallen on his head. Still he grappled with the situation.

"Ill! No!" he cried. "How stupid of me. I have forgotten my morning smoke. May I light a cigar?"

"With pleasure. You know these. Try one."

"You were saying——"

"That's all. This young fellow, Mensmore his name is, got mixed up with me over a Californian mine. I thought he had lots of coin, so when Springboks came along he and I went shares in underwriting them. The public didn't feed, so we were loaded. I tried all I knew to get him to pay up, but he absolutely couldn't. And now at the very moment affairs look promising he writes offering £2,000. More than that, he says, if necessary, he can get the remainder of his half, £1,750, from somebody. Where is his letter?"



Winter vanished into the interior.

Mr. Dodge looked on his table. "Oh, here it is. Addressed from 'Yacht, *White Heather*,' if you please. Quite swell, eh? Sir William Browne! That's the covey. I think I will let Sir William have 'em. It's a good, solid sort of name to have on the share register."

"I would if I were you," said Brett, hardly conscious of his surroundings.

"If *you* think so, I will. By Jove, this has been a good morning for me. Come and have lunch."

"No, thanks. I have a lot to attend to. By the way, where did Mensmore live?"

"I don't know. His address was always at the Orleans Club."

Somehow Brett got into the street and into a hansom. As the vehicle rolled off westward he crouched into the corner and tried to wrestle with the problem that befogged his brain.

Was Albert Mensmore Sydney H. Pyne? Was he Mrs. Hilmer's brother? The "Bertie" she had spoken of meant Albert as well as a hypothetical Herbert. Mensmore was an old schoolfellow of Sir Charles Lyle's. In all probability he knew Lady Lyle as well. He lived in Raleigh Mansions under an assumed name, and quitted his abode two days after Lady Delia was murdered.

Every circumstance pointed to the terrible assumption that at Mensmore's hands the unfortunate lady met her death. And Brett had sworn to avenge her memory!

He laughed with savage mirth as he reflected that he had himself helped this man to escape the punishment of Providence self-inflicted. It was, indeed, pitifully amusing to think how the clever detective had used his powers to befool himself. The very openness of the clue had helped to conceal it the more effectually. Were it not for Dodge and his Springboks he might have gone on indefinitely covering up the criminal's tracks by his own friendly actions. The situation was maddening, intolerable. Brett wanted to seize the reins and flog the horse into a mad gallop through the traffic as a relief to his feelings.

Blissfully unconscious of the living volcano he carried within, the cabby on the perch did not indulge in any such illegal antics. He quietly drove along the Embankment and delivered his seething fare at his Victoria Street chambers.

Quite oblivious of commonplace affairs, the barrister threw a shilling to the driver and darted out.

The man gazed at her Majesty's image with the air of one who had never before seen such a coin. It might have been a Greek obolus, so utter was his blank astonishment.

But Brett was across the pavement, and cabby had to find words, else it would be too late.

"Here, guvnor," he yelled, "what the ballyhooley do you call this?"

"What's the matter?" asked Brett, impatiently.

"Matter!" The cabman looked towards the sky to see if the heavens were falling. "Matter!" in a higher key, as a crowd began to gather. "I tykes him from Leaden'all Street to Victoria. 'E gives me a bob, an' 'e arsks me wot's the matter. I'd been on the ranks four bloomin' hours——"

"Oh, there you are," and Brett threw him half-a-crown before he disappeared up the steps.

Mr. Winter was waiting Brett's arrival. He wondered why the barrister was so perturbed, and resolved to strike whilst the iron was hot. So he, too, vanished into the interior.

(To be continued.)

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SHORT STORIES ABOUT PEOPLE.

We devote, every week, two pages of *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "The Zone of Fire," by Headon Hill, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case the source *must* be stated. The prize of One Guinea offered for the best Storyette in this competition has been won this week by Mr. W. Fowler, 120 Union Street, Torquay. Attempts this week must deal with Stories bout ANY SUBJECT, and must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, January 21st. Post-cards only, please.

The Sweetest Musical Instrument.

At a National School in the North of England, during a test examination in music, the teacher asked his class, as a last question:

"What is the sweetest musical instrument?"

To sharpen the wits of his pupils he offered a prize of sixpence for the best answer.

Amongst the many eager faces the master particularly noticed one boy, waving his hand, and muttering.

"Please, sir! Please, sir!" as he excitedly endeavoured to attract his attention first.

"Well, Johnny, what is it?" he asked.

"Please, sir, a toffy whistle," he replied.

The master, much amused, awarded Johnny the prize.

W. F.

Before the Ball.

In a Northern town recently an old gentleman was induced to buy a ticket for the local firemen's ball to be held early in the New Year.

As he wanted another ticket he went to the fire-station, but found no one there.

Roaming within the building he found an electric button on the side of the wall, and put his thumb to it.

The effect was electric in every sense of the word, for the next moment, through the ceiling, down the stairs, and from every other direction, firemen came, running and falling, the horses rushed out of their stables, and, in brief, all the machinery of a modern engine-house was suddenly put in motion.

Amid all this commotion stood the innocent old stranger, utterly unaware that he had pressed the fire-alarm.

Then, on one of the men calling to him from the top of the smoking engine for information as to the whereabouts of the fire, he looked up at the expectant flame-fighters, and mildly said:

"If you please, gentlemen, I should like to buy another ticket for the New Year's ball."

A. Y.

An Evasive Answer.

"John," said a clergyman to his factotum, "I shall be very busy this afternoon, and if anyone calls I do not wish to be disturbed."

"All right, sir. Will I tell them you're not in?"

"No, John; that would be a lie."

"An' what'll I say, then?"

"Oh, just put them off with an evasive answer."

At supper time John was asked if anyone had called.

"Yes, there did," he said.

"And what did you tell him?" asked the clergyman.

"I gave him an evasive answer."

"What was that?" queried his reverence.

"He asked me was yer reverence in, an' I sez to him, sez I, 'Was yer grandmother a hoot owl?'"

J. G. B.

An Absent-Minded Beggar.

Jones thought he had left his walking-stick on the previous evening at Brown's house, so on arriving in the City he decided to telephone on to him.

Jones (at the telephone): "Is that you, Brown? Did I leave my stick at your place last night?"

Brown: "Wait a moment, I will have a look."

Three minutes later, holding a stick up at the telephone: "Is this yours?"

Collapse of Jones.

W. T. C.

His Namesake.

At a recent inspection of recruits the German Emperor asked one of the men his name, and was told, "Andrée."

"Are you aware that you have a very famous namesake?" inquired his Majesty.

The recruit replied in the affirmative.

"Who told you that?" asked the Emperor.

"My Captain, your Majesty," replied the recruit.

"And what did your Captain tell you about Andrée?"

"He said, your Majesty, that he only wished Andrée had taken me with him."

G. E. G.

Reason Enough.

One day a half-witted youth was standing on the bank of a river, when he was accosted from the other side with:

"Hi, Jimmy! What is the best place to cross?"

Jimmy, who had a spite against the gentleman, sent him to the deepest part.

In crossing, the gentleman was nearly drowned, and when he came up to where Jimmy was standing, began scolding him for telling him wrongly.

"Well! well!" returned Jimmy, "I've seen the ducks and the geese cross there, and you've longer legs than them!"

F. W.

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Lavish for Once.

THE child was generous to a fault. Whenever it had anything given, it yearned to share it with other children, but its mother (from whom it had not inherited its instincts) put a strong curb upon its impulsiveness.

"Mammy," said the child one day, lifting a chubby, pleading face to the woman's hard one, "U'cle Tom has gived me a bag of sweeties. Please may I let Mr. Smif's babies join?"

Mammy peered critically into the bag of indigestible sweets, while "Mrs. Smif's babies" and Mrs. Smith herself stood by waiting for the verdict. After awhile, with a smile of rare graciousness, mammy returned the bag.

"Yes, love, you may give them six apiece," she sweetly condescended. "They're not fit for you to eat, my precious!"

R. A. H. G.

This Way Out.

ONE Christmas a man who had leased a skating-pond for the previous two years, with terribly bad results, had his hopes raised by an ever-thickening sheet of ice. Skaters flocked down but the lessee refused their money.

"Can't do it," he said sorrowfully. "Won't bear, you know."

One skater, more determined than the rest, however, managed to slip in, and, gaining the pond, began gyrating about.

"Come off that, will you!" yelled the keeper, catching sight of him.

"Can't! 'Tain't bearing round the edges!" shouted the skater, as he executed a demi-semicircle round some thin ice. Next moment a crack, a splash, and a cry of "Help!" as he quitted the surface for the bottom of the pond.

"Look here," yelled the lessee, scarcely appeased, "you've got to come out of that, or the water won't freeze; but you don't break no more ice, d'ye hear! Crawl underneath to where I am, and I'll knock a hole for you to get out."

C. P. F.

"Done Brown!"

ONE morning a gentleman riding on a "pirate 'bus," after tendering his penny for his usual "lift" in the City, was surprised to learn that the fare was twopence.

"So you're a pirate, eh!" he exclaimed.

"It doesn't matter what I am," retorted the conductor, "you've got to pay another penny or else jump down."

"I shall do neither," said the passenger. "You've got the wrong sort of man to deal with. Here's my card; you can just do what you like."

"Oh, all right," replied the man, "you'll hear some more about this!"

About three weeks afterwards, when the incident had completely passed from his mind, an unstamped letter was delivered at the passenger's residence, with twopence to pay on it. The addressee paid it.

Judge then of his feelings when, on opening the envelope, he found merely a piece of brown paper with the words "Done Brown!" written across it.

W. J. C.

MY IDEAL MAN.

(*For Ladies Only.*)

What is your idea of a perfect man, embodying all those qualities which you consider to be the best?

Write out in a paragraph of not more than two hundred words a description of your ideal man.

A prize of two guineas will be awarded to the sender of the attempt which the Editor considers to be the best.

All attempts should be addressed to the Editor of *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and should reach this office not later than Tuesday, January 22nd. Envelopes should be marked LADY in the top left-hand corner.

MY IDEAL WOMAN.

(*For Gentlemen Only.*)

Every man has his idea of a perfect woman. What is yours?

Write out your opinion in a paragraph of not more than two hundred words.

A prize of two guineas will be awarded to the sender of the attempt which the Editor considers to be the best.

All attempts should be addressed to the Editor of *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and should reach this office not later than Tuesday January 22nd. Envelopes should be marked MAN in the top left-hand corner.

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Write your name and address plainly in ink on a slip of paper, also on the back of the portrait you are sending us. Get a postal order for 7s. (if the photograph be that of a soldier or sailor get a 6s. postal order). Place all of these in an envelope, or make a securely packed parcel of them and address it to the PORTRAIT EDITOR, *Pearson's Weekly*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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Orders will be treated in rotation.

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Result of "DISCOVERER" COMPETITION.

The solution to this puzzle was "Short Stories," and Stereoscopes have been awarded to the following, whose letters, containing correct solutions, were opened first:—

H. Auliff, 11 Cavendish Villas, Wood Green, N.
G. Kingston, 99 Church Road, Hove.
J. McCaffrey, 15 Crocus Street, Belfast.
A. B. L. Jones, Gower House, Marlborough Road, Newport, Monmouth.
R. Fisher, Canada House, Baldwin Street, Bristol.

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BURIED ALIVE.

"WELCOME home, Alf, my boy."

My brother grasped my hand as he said these words, and did not release it until he had led me up the time-honoured steps of our ancestral home, and begun to assist me to unfasten my great coat.

"How are you, my lad?" he continued, without giving me time to reply to his hearty reception. "Why you look as brown as a berry, and certainly none the worse for your fifteen years' nabobism."

I had just returned to England, after having endured the trying climate of India for fifteen years, and had hastened at once to the old mansion where I had been born, and which was, at the time of my story, in the possession of my eldest brother, Stephen.

Our family bear the honoured name of Stanley, and are a younger branch of the noble house of that name. They had been settled for many centuries in a wild part of the North-west Riding of Yorkshire, upon an estate that was very beautiful from an artistic point view, but very poor from a pecuniary aspect; and consequently many generations of younger sons had been forced to push their way in the world, as I had.

My half-brother Stephen was twelve years older than I was, and had always regarded me with an affection more fatherly than brotherly, delighting in giving me pet names; and even when years of travel had tanned my originally fair complexion and silvered my hair, I was amused by the way in which, upon this our first meeting after many years, he ignored the present, and kept up the old manners and sayings that had characterised him when I was a boy at Stanley House.

A substantial repast was provided for me in the old dining-room, and after I had done justice to it, and the grey-haired butler (who had officiated in my father's time) had brought in the wine, Stephen and I were soon deep in conversation on topics peculiarly interesting to me.

"So you think the old place is changed?" he said musingly in reply to a remark that had fallen from me. "I've not noticed it; but it may be, it may be."

"Indeed it is, Stephen," I said, "and I think you are allowing the best part of the house to fall into decay. Now, in my father's day the west wing——"

"Hush," he cried, interrupting me with a startled look in his eyes. "Don't mention that, for Heaven's sake. *She* loved those rooms."

In a moment I had grasped his hand.

"Forgive me, Stephen," I exclaimed, as the terrible past flashed across my mind, and I saw I had opened an old wound.

"There is nothing to forgive, Alf, my boy," he said, looking into the bright fire with an anxious, troubled face. "You could not know all the horror of that terrible time."

Indeed I could not; for I was but a boy when I went to India. Nevertheless, I had heard sufficient whilst I was there of my brother's unfortunate marriage to convince me of the pain which my allusion to it would give to him.

I had heard how he had married a beautiful girl, and how fondly he had loved her, and how, after three months of married life, she had deserted him. With whom or whither she had gone, no one knew; and her name had become almost a forgotten sound at Stanley House.

I changed the subject of conversation, and tried to make him forget the unpleasant recollections which my words had raised, by relating some of the most amusing adventures that had befallen me whilst abroad; but, though he listened with interest, and seemed to try to shake off the gloom that had settled upon his mind, he never quite regained his wonted cheerfulness during the remainder of the evening, and retired early to rest, excusing himself by saying it was his custom.

Amongst the evils of civilisation which my somewhat stormy passage through life had taught me, that of late hours was by no means the smallest; and, knowing it would be useless for me to turn into bed before midnight, I put on my hat, lit another cigar, and strolled into the grounds to get a breath of fresh air.

It was a fine summer night. The moon was shining brightly from a clear starlit sky. I knew every foot of the ground, and visited many of my favourite haunts; and it must have been after eleven o'clock before I began to think of returning.

My cigar had gone out when I reached the bottom of the long avenue of tall trees, and, beginning to feel chilly, I walked somewhat quickly towards the house, crunching the gravel beneath my feet as I went.

As I drew near the front door my attention was attracted by the sudden appearance of a man bearing a lantern, who had evidently heard my footsteps, for he stopped and awaited my approach. At first I thought he was one of the servants; but upon drawing nearer I was surprised to find it was my brother.

I hastened to speak to him, when, to my great astonishment, after glancing at me eagerly, he turned away without any sign of recognition, and hurried rapidly in the direction of the west wing.

My first intention was to call out after him; but, upon second thought, I decided not to do so; for I was persuaded that he had seen and recognised me, and that

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perhaps my company might not be desired; so I entered the house, and was soon in bed and asleep.

The next morning when I came downstairs, I found Stephen already in the breakfast-room awaiting me. He was standing with his back towards the fire.

"Good-morning, Alf," he said smiling in his cheerful manner. "You are an exception to most lovers of late hours, I see."

"Yes," I replied. "I sleep soundly, and therefore rise early."

"You'll find the nights long and dull here, I'm afraid, after the excitement to which you've been accustomed."

"Oh no, not at all," I said, "There are so many old associations about Stanley House that I think I shall never be dull here. Now, last night I strolled through the grounds, and did not return until close upon midnight."

"These late hours seem to me to be a very stupid custom, and one which I could never cultivate. I think, my boy, that you would have been much wiser if you had turned in when I did, and slept until morning."

"Why, I daresay I was in bed before you."

"In bed before me?" he repeated, with a puzzled look. "What do you mean?"

"I mean just what I say—that I was in bed and asleep before you were, unless you finish your rest and rise before twelve at night."

"You must be joking, Alf," he said incredulously. "I was in bed by nine o'clock, and was up this morning by six."

"Surely you must be mistaken, Stephen; for I met you, or your double at the top of the avenue last night as I was returning to the house."

"Impossible!"

"Indeed, I did. I would have spoken to you, but you hurried away, and I thought you had seen me and wished to be alone."

"It could not have been me. I was never out of the house after seven o'clock."

All that day I was haunted by the recollection of what I had seen on the previous night, and my brother's denial. I had heard singular stories of Stephen being a somnambulist, before I had left England, and could not help wondering if he was still addicted to freaks of that kind; but as I had never seen him walk in his sleep, and as I had only half-believed the tales I had been told, I was not inclined to accept this explanation as a solution of the problem. However, I was determined to solve the mystery.

As soon as all were in bed, therefore, on the night following that on which I had arrived at Stanley House, I again went out into the ground, if I met the mysterious person whom I had seen on the previous night, to follow him and discover who he was.

The moon was shining fitfully from behind the stormy clouds that now and again obscured her disc, and a breeze of wind stirred in the branches of the trees. I paced upon the grass beneath the tall elms that pointed their foliaged branches to the sky.

I had taken up my point of observation just in front of the west wing of the house, which had been so long shut up and left to fall into decay. So great had been my brother's horror lest any portion of it should be touched by human foot, that not only had he boarded up every window and door that had communication without, but he had also caused to be built up every door that had given access from it to the main body of the building.

My head was full of thoughts of my boyhood, as I walked to and fro. I remembered many happy days spent in those rooms, for they had been my father's favourites; and it was not without a pang of regret that I looked at them, deserted and ruinous, simply because a false woman had also loved them.

I had waited until past midnight, and had almost given up my quest as hopeless, and was about to return to the house, when I heard a footstep on the damp gravel approaching.

I drew back into the shadow of the trees, and peered forth into the darkness, for at that moment a thick cloud shut out the light of the moon.

Nearer and nearer the footstep came, and at length the glimmering lantern shone out in the darkness. The man bearing the light went up to the principal entrance of the west wing, where he paused, and a moment later I heard a key shoot back the heavy lock; and the next instant the light and man disappeared as the door closed behind them.

Animated and excited, I stepped quickly, but softly, across the gravel walk to the door, where, for a moment I paused and listened. A footstep was ascending the creaking staircase. I waited until I heard it on the second flight before I tried the door. I found it open, and entered softly, closing it behind me. Before proceeding further, I cautiously took off my boots, and then I ascended the cold clammy stairs that smelt of the tomb.

From the second landing there opened a suite of apartments, which I remembered had been called the strong rooms, because they were in the very heart of the building, had few windows, and only one doorway for ingress or egress. The heavy oak door that opened into these rooms I found was ajar, and a bright light streamed out between the opening.

To my great astonishment, when I entered this room, I heard voices in the apartment beyond. At first I was so amazed that I could not distinguish a single word that was spoken; but as I became calm, and after drawing close to the door of the room from which the sound proceeded, I distinctly heard a woman's voice, in tearful accents, saying:

"Oh, if you love me, deliver me from this place! What have I done that I should be forced to bear this punishment? Have I not loved with a true woman's love? Speak to me. Do not look at me with eyes so glassy that they seem to see not. Give me one word, that I may hear you as the same Stephen that you were before this fearful malady overtook you. Let me again see the light of heaven, and the faces of my friends."

I crept softly nearer to the door, and got into a position from which I could partly distinguish the occupants of the room and their surroundings. It was a handsomely furnished apartment, half-boudoir, half-drawing-room.

Every luxury which the heart or brain could desire was scattered about in endless variety. In the centre of the floor stood my brother; but with such a strange, wicked, frenzied expression on his face, that, had I not known his features well, I should have thought it could not be he. Before him knelt a woman whose face was buried in her hands.

"You shall not leave me thus!" she cried as he turned to go. "I must, I will have my liberty!"

She had started to her feet, and ran to the door. But Stephen, still without any change in his fixed, staring countenance, seized her roughly by the arm, and pushed her from him, and walked quickly towards the door

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I had hardly time to draw back into the shadow of a heavy curtain, when he entered the room where I was, and walked quickly across to the landing, closing this last door after him, and locking it.

Thus I found myself also a prisoner. I heard his footstep descend the stairs, and then the sound died slowly away.

For a few moments I stood puzzled as to what course I should pursue. I knew it would be useless to attempt to force the massive lock, or when morning came to try to attract the outer world; for, as I have said, the rooms were strongly built and situated in the very heart of the west wing, and the few windows which had of yore let in the light of heaven to them had been filled up with strong masonry.

I was roused from my thoughts by a sob from the occupant of the next chamber. Going up to the door which Stephen had closed behind him, I knocked, and then entered.

My tap had evidently not been heard, for I found the graceful form seated in a chair in an attitude which betokened despair, her arms upon the table, her head leaning forward, and her beautiful, dishevelled hair falling in waving folds about her.

"Madam."

I had walked up to her, and placed my hand upon her shoulder.

"Oh!" and she turned towards me her pale, tearful, horror-stricken face, then shrank away in fear, "Who are you? Pray do not hurt me. I know I am helpless."

It was some time before I could convince her that I was really a friend; for so long had she been buried in these rooms that her mind had become almost unhinged, and her sense of perception blunted. By degrees, however, I made her understand who I was, and how I had so come there; and then, in answer to my questions, I gleaned the history of her captivity.

When my brother married her she was a handsome young girl of eighteen, and he was verging on the period of middle age. For three months after their marriage he had been kind and attentive—all, in fact, that a wife could desire of her husband. Just at the end of that time, however, he discovered, accidentally, several letters which had been written by her before her marriage, to a former lover; and for some days afterwards he was moody, jealous, and strange in his conduct.

One night he entered her room with that fixed, frenzied, wicked look upon his face which she had never seen there before, but which had marred his features in all her interviews with him since, and directed her by signs to follow him, a mandate which in her terror she readily obeyed. He conducted her to a gloomy chamber, lighted only by a small oil lamp, and then left her, locking the door behind him. At intervals, for some weeks afterwards, he visited her bringing food and clothing with him; but always coming in the night, and bearing himself in a silent, changed, peculiar manner. At length he led her back again to her own suite of apartments (those in which I had discovered her) where, during her absence, all the windows had been built up, thus cutting off communication with the outer world. Here he had visited her almost every night since, bringing her the necessaries of life, coming like an apparition, and going as he came.

"I think those foolish letters of mine," she said in conclusion, "written before I had learnt to love my husband, have turned his brain. I was warned before I married him that he was affected by a peculiar malady of sleep-walking, and that when under its influence he not only lost complete control of his reason, but also seemed to live a double life. When awake he was generous, frank and good; but when in a somnambulant state, I was told, he was morose, jealous, wicked—in a word, insane; and that in his waking hours he had no recollection of what took place, or what he did when in this latter state."

Fortunately I found I had my powder-flask in my pocket, and thus was able to set myself and my unfortunate brother's wife, at liberty, by exploding the locks.

I took my *protégée* to the rectory where the rector, who was an old college friend of mine, was not a little surprised to receive such visitors at so early an hour.

Before returning to Stanley House, I rode on the rector's cob to my brother's doctor, who lived about three miles away, and consulted him upon Stephen's sad condition.

He told me that he was quite aware of the facts of the case, but that he had not for a moment thought the malady could have been capable of working so much mischief.

He suggested that in all probability a crisis in the disease would now be reached, brought about by the mental shock which the discovery of the escape of the captive would give when next the somnambulist visited the west wing.

The result of this crisis would either leave him a hopeless maniac or completely cure him.

At the doctor's request I arranged to meet him the same night at twelve o'clock, in order to watch my brother's movements.

I then rode back to the rectory, and from there proceeded at once to Stanley House.

After resting in my room for a short while, I came downstairs, and found Stephen more cheerful and genial than usual, all unconscious, poor fellow, of the fate hanging over him.

At night my brother retired to rest at his usual time, and I went out into the grounds to meet the doctor, about an hour and a half afterwards.

When I met him we proceeded to the west wing together, to watch the effect of the shock of discovery upon the patient. As soon as we reached the door, I saw that Stephen had been there before us, for the door was ajar.

With a heart that beat fast with my fears, I hurried into the house, and was about to run upstairs, when I stumbled over some obstacle at the bottom. The doctor, who was following closely, carried a dark lantern, and its light soon revealed to us the bleeding form of my unhappy brother.

"He is dead," the doctor said, rising from his knees, after making a hasty examination of the body. "In his frenzy he must have dashed himself down the stairs. Poor fellow! we have been too late to save him!"

* * * * *

Five years have fled since that time. Stanley House has been newly painted and renovated, and again holds a happy bride and bridegroom. A fair face looks over my shoulder as I write, and drops a tear upon the paper that contains a history of her sorrows. But a smile flits about her lips as I kiss her; and we look out together upon the beautiful scene, in the midst of which stands our home, and forget the darkness of the past in the brightness of the future.

T. P. BROWNE.

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THE SAILORS' ANGEL.

THE story of Henrik Brandes and Maria Hansen is still told occasionally by some of the older people of the inland district lying between Christiania and Bergen, although the younger generations do not pay much regard to it. It is a story of simple faith and love that is worthy to be kept in remembrance.

Henrik was a sailor; he came of a sea-faring family and had taken to that kind of life as part of the natural order of things. Although only a young man, he was master of a small craft that traded between Drammen and other ports of Scandinavia and sometimes to a British port. Henrik's father owned one-third part of the vessel, which in some measure accounted for the position occupied by his son, but there was no doubt that Henrik was as capable as many an older man.

Maria was his cousin. Her parents were dead, her mother having died about two years before this story commences; since that time she had acted as housekeeper to her uncle, who was a widower.

It had been a settled thing for years that Henrik and Maria were to become man and wife in due course; the young people themselves had grown up together and were deeply attached to one another. The marriage was to take place on the return of Henrik from his voyage to England.

Before he sailed, they stood at the extremity of a rocky peak that jutted into the sea and had their real parting, for when he sailed there would be so many to say farewell to the crew and the captain that there would be no opportunity for the affectionate leave taking that helped to cheer them during the time of separation. Not that among these simple people there was any false modesty, but a lover's parting is not for public eyes.

There was also another reason. Maria had noticed with some concern that Henrik, probably in consequence of his voyages abroad and his contact with more worldly people, was losing some of the faith so characteristic of his forefathers and his neighbours. She conceived it to be a part of her duty as a woman and his future wife to bring him back to his old belief.

The conversation during this final interview had not been so satisfactory to Maria as she had anticipated. Henrik, although he had listened to her patiently enough, had smiled at her enthusiasm in endeavouring to show him that he was taking a wrong path.

"There is nothing against me; no one can say that Henrik Brandes ever did a wrong act," he said, folding her tenderly in his arms and kissing her, "and I promise you that no one shall ever have the chance of saying so! now, don't grieve because I do not think the same as other people hereabouts. Surely I am no worse because I do not place any confidence in what our neighbours say about that piece of rock out there in the sea, which they call the Sailors' Angel."

"Oh, Henrik, don't scoff at it!" exclaimed Maria, half in tears, "it has not lost its virtue; it is because no woman of recent years has had the courage to face the danger of rowing out to it in a storm, that we have had no proofs of Divine intervention. Do we not know of many instances in olden times when a sailor husband or a sailor lover has been rescued from the fury of the storm because his wife or his sweetheart had the courage and faith to put the Promise to the test?"

Henrik evaded an answer, which he knew would grieve her, by kissing her once more. He knew the legend of the Sailors' Angel quite well; it was to the effect that, as a reward for the holy living of a good woman who had spent her life in the service of God and had met with her death on that very rock in a successful attempt to save the crew of a storm-beaten vessel, a Promise was given that if a believing woman ever risked her life by rowing in a storm to that spot, and there offered up a prayer for the safety of a fellow creature, the prayer should be granted.

"I trust that you will never be in such grave danger," cried Maria fervently, "but if you are, I shall put the Promise to the test! Then you will see who is right!"

"So be it!" exclaimed Henrik solemnly. He was touched by her devotion and his levity vanished. "Now let us go back and spend the last hour or two with my father."

Henrik sailed, and Maria waited hopefully for his return and employed her spare time in the preparation of the humble trousseau and other matters pertaining to the wedding which was now not very far off.

Often and often she looked out to sea in the direction of the Sailors' Angel, and her imagination transformed the pinnacle of the rock into the shape of a woman gazing pityingly on the vast expanse of ocean, as though prepared to take compassion on those for whom her aid might be invoked.

She had been out with her father on one occasion in order to get a closer view of the imaginary statue; it did not lie in the course of vessels coming to the port, but was at some distance out of the usual run and therefore offered no danger to such vessels in a general way. There was nothing particularly noticeable about the rock; it was not altogether unlike a rough hewn figure of a woman —but that was all.

Yet the legend had sunk so deeply into the minds of the people that everyone who looked at it was positive that it presented the outlines of the face and form of an angel.

Henrik's voyage was to last at least a fortnight; he had to touch at other Scandinavian ports before proceeding to the British port which was the limit of his trip. The weather remained fine during the first week, but then there came a change, the winter's storms seemed to commence and each day was signalled by furious gales or heavy snow showers.

Maria felt a little anxious during the first two days of this second week, but her anxiety became more profound as the time passed and the weather grew still more furious. She began to fear for the safety of Henrik, whose craft should now be forcing its way through the turbulent waters homewards.

Henrik was losing the religious faith in which he had been reared, and Maria had misgivings that this falling-off might bring upon him some heavy punishment. She lost her appetite and slept but little, her cheeks became high and her face assumed a haggard look. This alteration in her appearance and manner

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attracted the attention of her uncle, who rallied her in his hearty and kindly fashion on her lack of fortitude.

"You'll never do for a sailor's wife, my lass!" he cried cheerily. "If you are down-hearted at every storm that rises when Henrik is away, what a lively companion you will be for me! come, come! you must cheer up or the lad will be miserable while he is away just because he thinks that you are worrying yourself so much about him. It will be catching; and you will be a most wretched pair."

Maria was grateful to the old man for his attempt to cheer her and she recognised that a sailor is not bound to come to harm every time there is a gale of wind; but her fears this time were based on more than the chances of danger through stress of weather, and although she did her best to be bright when in the presence of the elder Brandes, to whom she could not open her heart, yet she grew more and more troubled until she could scarcely bear the weight of her fears.

The fortnight had passed, but Henrik's ship had not reached port. This was not regarded as extraordinary by his father, as the rough weather would naturally drive the vessel somewhat out of her course and so lengthen the duration of the voyage.

"Bless you, I've been three or four days overdue at this time of the year!" cried the old man. "It's rough work, beating and tacking, but he'll turn up all right, never fear!"

Disquieting news reached them on the following day. An English vessel, apparently driven out of her course, had struck a rock quite close to the Sailors' Angel and had foundered with all hands. Might not a similar fate befall Henrik?

Maria did not close her eyes in sleep that night, but lay listening to the howling of the wind as it drove the thickly falling snow flakes against the windows and shook the houses. The roar of the angry sea sounded in her ears like a condemning voice, foretelling the doom of Henrik, his crew and his vessel. At last she could bear it no longer. Her white face set with grim determination, she arose and dressed herself.

It was early morning and still dark. She went from her room straight to that in which her uncle was sleeping, and entering the chamber and approaching the bed she touched him lightly on the arm that lay outside the coverlet. Brandes was awake in a moment.

"Who's that?" he asked, starting up in bed. "Maria, what is it?" he demanded, as he recognised the girl by the light of the small lamp which she carried.

"Will you help me to get out the boat?" asked Maria, answering his question by another which fairly made him gasp.

"I am going to the Sailors' Angel to save Henrik," continued the girl resolutely. "He is in great danger—I know he is—and I must go there and offer up a prayer that he may be saved."

"The girl's mad!" exclaimed Brandes as soon as he recovered sufficiently from his amazement to use his voice.

He was not entirely uninfluenced by the legend and yet it appeared to him to be the act of a madwoman to attempt such a task as that proposed by Maria.

"You can't go, you will never do it!"

"I can try," responded Maria quietly. "Don't try to keep me from it; I am determined. I must do it; I cannot rest, for Henrik's life is at stake. I have a vision constantly floating before my eyes—a vision of Henrik's ship being beaten this way and that way by the fury of the gale and then dashed against a rock, and Henrik's body being thrown up by the waves, waiting to be grasped by a loving hand. And the hungry waves are trying to reach him again and swallow him up. Oh, I must go, I must go!"

The girl stood erect, with staring eyes as though she were gazing at the actual picture which she had just described in such intense tones to her uncle.

Her voice seemed far away; she had forgotten her surroundings and her whole being was absorbed in the vision.

Uncle Brandes was unable to raise any further objection; he looked upon her as one who had passed from the natural to the supernatural, and told her that he would follow her to the place where the boat was kept.

"Heaven keep her!" murmured the old man devoutly, as he hurriedly dressed himself and went after the girl, who, having put on a rough waterproof cap and an ample cloak, had passed from the little cottage into the wild night.

The boat belonged to Brandes and was kept in a shed from which it could be dragged with tolerable ease by its owner to a tiny inlet, and thence rowed into the open sea.

Brandes found the girl waiting for him at the shed; without a word he unlocked the door and pulled the boat over the ground, Maria voluntarily assisting him.

When it was in the water with the rope wound round a peg, ready for Maria to get into it, the old man made one more attempt to dissuade her.

"Don't go, my girl!" he pleaded. "You will be drowned, the boat won't live in such a sea—your arms aren't strong enough. Think what that will be to Henrik when he comes back!"

He had to place his mouth close to her ear and speak in a high tone in order to make her hear what he said.

The wind blew the sound away so that she only just caught the words.

She shook her head.

"I must go or he won't come back! What will life be to me without Henrik, and I would go anyhow—even if I knew that I should surely lose my life in saving his."

Her face, wet with the snow flakes, touched his. She kissed him and then resolutely took her seat in the boat.

Maria Hansen was of the fisher class and was as strong as many a man in the trading towns. She knew how to handle the oar, too, and she soon had the skiff out of the calm of the inlet, with the stem headed for the Sailors' Angel.

Then began the fierce battle with the waves and the blinding snow. Hither and thither the boat was tossed or driven, despite all Maria's efforts to keep it steady. She could only judge the direction of the rock by a light which was visible from time to time from the port of Drammen, and by the aid of this light she kept the nose of the boat towards her destination.

It was hard work, and the chances of reaching the rock in safety were very narrow; but Maria never wavered in her determination. Time after time it seemed as if the barque would be swamped, but it righted itself each time and rode on the crest of the next wave.

Her hands grew cold and stiff, notwithstanding the hard work, which would, under ordinary conditions have made her life tingle all through her body.

But there is a limit to human endurance, although that limit may be extended by the force of love, and Maria found that her strength was giving out. Her

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arms ached and refused to do their work properly; her breath came in short, quick gasps.

A low moan escaped her and she breathed a prayer for help, as one oar was dragged from her enfeebled grip and the boat was whirled round like a plaything.

The next instant she felt her frail craft grate on the rock, and she was thrown out and some distance from it.

She clutched at a projection against which her hand had struck, and pulled herself up by it. She made a few steps forward and found herself in a kind of recess not more than two feet deep, and she knew that she had reached the Sailors' Angel.

She rested in this alcove for a short time in order to regain her breath and a little more strength, then she faced the storm again and made her way to the front of the legendary statue.

Here, in the midst of the storm and with the angry waves foaming on all sides, she knelt down, clasped her hands and murmured a prayer to Heaven that the Promise might be redeemed in favour of Henrik.

Unmindful of the elements, she prayed with all her soul, never doubting that she would receive the reward of her efforts and her faith.

Then she arose, went back to the alcove and waited. She had taken no thought about the return journey and, strangely enough, she felt no anxiety on that score. She would wait until the storm abated, when someone would come for her—her boat was gone—and when she reached home she would find Henrik safe and well. Or perhaps Henrik would come and fetch her.

She remained in this recess, sheltered from the weather to a considerable extent, until mid-day; two or three times she ventured to the front in order to gaze upon the face of the statue, as if she expected to see some sign of an answer to her supplication.

At noon she made this little journey again, but scarcely had she reached the front than a big wave threw something at her feet that made her start back with a cry of alarm.

She stooped down to examine the object. It was a human form. It was Henrik!

With a cry that was more like an exclamation of gratitude than an expression of fear or grief, she caught her lover's form by the arms, lifting his head from the ground, and dragged it to the alcove.

Here she did her best to restore the unconscious Henrik by every means in her power, and at last had the great joy of seeing him open his eyes and hearing him murmur her name.

At the same moment the fury of the storm began to abate; the wind sank, the air grew calm and the sun began to peep forth in watery rays.

The Promise was redeemed once more—such was the thought that passed through the mind of Maria Hansen.

As soon as it was in any way possible to do so, old Brandes and a friend set out in another boat to the Sailors' Angel in search of Maria; her uncle was convinced that she had gone down in the storm, but he made this little voyage as a forlorn hope. When Brandes returned, he brought with him, to the great joy of the people, his son Henrik, and the girl who had done so much for Henrik's safety.

Such is the story of a girl's faith and the power of love.

Some people there are who call it superstition, but if superstition can effect so much with the aid of love, then let superstition continue.

GEORGE KNIGHT.

On a cold winter night,

when the chill seems to penetrate to the bones, "a cup of hot Bovril" will be found to be just what is needed. It is a splendid warming drink, thoroughly agreeable to the taste. Bovril is also peculiarly a nourishing and strengthening beverage; energising, vitalising, sustaining.

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A SCOTCH GIRAFFE.

MR. MCGREGOR, of Dumfries, is a man of an original turn of mind. It should be mentioned that his name is not McGregor, and that his foot has never been on the heath of Dumfries. His real name and residence cannot be mentioned without inflicting pain and libel suits on the mentioner. However, the facts in his case cannot be altered by calling him McGregor, and they will remain the same, no matter where he may reside, and it is with these facts alone that the reader is concerned.

Not long ago there was a quiet little masquerade at Dumfries, which Mr. McGregor was invited to attend. He gladly accepted the invitation, and at once began to think of a fitting costume. Mr. McGregor is a man of strong individuality, and he scorned the disguises affected by other men. He refused to be a Mephistopheles, or a Charles II., or a brigand, or a Pierrot. He even refused to be a golden-haired ballet girl, or an aged Hebrew prophet, although the child of Israel who supplied masquerade dresses to the fashionable world of Dumfries insisted that either of those characters would "shoot him like a goat." Mr. McGregor was determined to wear a costume which should be novel and unique, and, as the sequel shows, he successfully carried out his purpose.

At first Mr. McGregor's tastes led him to entertain the idea of illustrating in his own person the peculiar features of his beloved Scotland. He thought of disguising himself either as the Forth Bridge or as Stirling Castle, but the difficulty of obtaining the requisite dresses compelled him to change his mind. A like reason caused him to abandon the idea of assuming the character of Loch Lomond, or that of the Bass Rock. Baffled in these directions, but still strong in his love of nature, he determined to be an attractive and sensational animal, and when the masqueraders were finally assembled he appeared before them in the likeness of a large and beautiful giraffe.

According to the most trustworthy accounts of the masquerade, Mr. McGregor played his part with great ability and success. His hide was beautifully variegated, his neck was fully fifteen feet long, and the grace and elegance of all four of his legs was the theme of universal admiration.

When he waltzed he would take a round turn and a timber hitch (he was an experienced yatchsman), with his neck round the waist of his partner, and when the supper table was ready he would reach that useful neck over the heads of a dozen gentlemen and bite off the top of a mould of vanilla ice in a way that paralysed the waiters and called forth the applauding shrieks of enthusiastic ladies.

It was in the matter of champagne that Mr. McGregor made his first mistake. He claimed that his throat could not be irrigated throughout its entire length without the aid of at least three bottles of wine. Very likely he was right if we regard his conduct from a strictly zoological point of view. An animal that runs so largely to neck as does the giraffe cannot be expected to moisten his throat with the same quantity of fluid that would satisfy a short-necked horse, or even an ordinary man. But Mr. McGregor forgot that, although he was a giraffe, so far as external experiences were concerned, his stomach was purely human.

As might have been expected, it came to pass that when Mr. McGregor had burdened his interior with the contents of at least three bottles of champagne he became nervously excited, and, after creating considerable alarm among the more timid guests, he withdrew from the ball-room, banging his lofty head against the chandelier and the upper part of the door-casing, and breathing forth threatenings and slaughter from a carefully-concealed but practicable mouth, situated near the top of his left foreleg.

Under other circumstances Mr. McGregor would have gone promptly home, but knowing that his landlady would refuse to give admittance to a giraffe at three o'clock in the morning unless he should be provided with the best references from the Royal Zoological Society, Mr. McGregor sought the shelter of a friendly tree on the outskirts of Dumfries, where he lay down to sleep. The night was cold, and therefore Mr. McGregor preferred to keep on his dress, especially as his neck, when folded up, made a smooth pillow.

Thus comfortably couched, he slept the sleep of the just, and would doubtless have awakened sober and refreshed had not an unforeseen accident suddenly impelled him to spring to as many of his feet as he could conveniently manage, and to call on the universe to bear witness that he had been basely and brutally assassinated.

It so happened that the morning after the masquerade a young man from London, who was spending a week at Dumfries, arose at dawn, and went forth with his gun to worship at the shrine of Nature, and to kill, if possible, a pheasant or a haggis. He was wholly unacquainted with the game of Scotland, but he knew that other men had killed birds somewhere north of the Tweed, and he saw no reason why he should not do likewise.

To his vast astonishment he presently beheld a giraffe sleeping peacefully under a spreading oak-tree.

The young man from London was not lacking in decision of character. He merely paused long enough to remark to himself that the capacity of Scotland for producing every kind of rich and gorgeous animal was even greater than he had hitherto imagined it to be, and then opened fire with both barrels.

At the first shot the giraffe moved uneasily, and made a few unintelligible remarks, but the second shot hit him in some sensitive locality, and led him to make that hurried appeal to the universe which has already been mentioned. The young man from London would doubtless have regarded the ability of this particular giraffe to speak intelligibly, or, at all events in the local dialect, as only another proof of the merits of Scotland as a producer of able animals, and would have reloaded his gun and continued to shoot had not Mr. McGregor madly torn his neck from his shoulders, unbuttoned his hide, and emerged in the character of an irate Caledonian.

The young man from London was soon convinced that he had made a mistake. He ceased firing, and, after making an apology to Mr. McGregor, withdrew from the field in search of brown paper and vinegar, while Mr. McGregor limped homeward with a wound in the calf of his right leg and bitterness in his heart, and lost no time in going before a commissioner of deeds, or other person authorised to administer oaths, in whose presence he swore that he would never again attend a masquerade or wear a fancy dress.

W. E. PARSONS.

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A Village Industry.

TWENTY-FIVE years ago an attempt was made in the village of Histon, near Cambridge, to solve the problem, how to make land pay in the face of foreign competition? The country was then at one of its educational epochs. We were being taught the vast food and health value of fruit. Incidentally, also, we were slowly gaining the knowledge that pure sugar, properly treated, was one of the greatest nutrients, in a small compass, with which man has been blessed. Further, that sugar and fruit in combination—when the latter is fresh, ripe, and luscious—makes a most valuable addition to our daily dietary, especially to that of children. The firm gradually expanded until they are now the largest fruit-cultivating jam and jelly makers in Great Britain. The watchwords have been *pure and fresh material*, with the most positive cleanliness in the manufacturing processes. And

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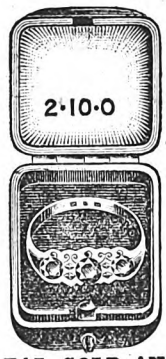

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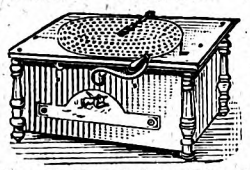

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Below will be found ten pictures; each picture representing the name of a football club.

If you look at the picture in the margin you will see that the name is Blackburn Rovers. What are the other names?

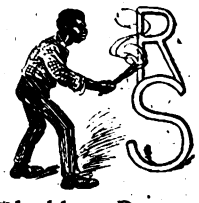
CLOSING DAY, TUESDAY, JANUARY 22nd.

All you have to do is to write underneath each picture, in the space provided, the name of the club you believe the picture to represent. The names are those of both Rugby and Association clubs. **Pin your three lists together and send them to the Editor, Pearson's Weekly, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., in an envelope marked "Second."**

Where the names of two clubs embody that of the same town, but with a different addition, the full title is indicated in the picture.

The prizes will be paid to the competitors from whom we receive the correct, or most nearly correct, solutions.

Example.



Blackburn Rovers.

No more than one prize will go to any competitor.

It must be taken as a condition of the competition that anybody competing therein agrees to abide by the Editor's final decision.

Intending competitors in the above would do well to procure a copy of "The Football Who's Who," which contains the names of most of the big clubs. This book will be found of great service in discovering the names depicted. It only costs a shilling, and may be obtained of all booksellers, and post free for 1s. 3d. from the publisher, 17 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

No. 21.....

No. 22.....

No. 23.....

No. 24.....

No. 25.....

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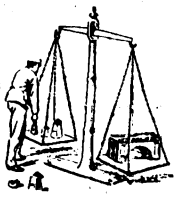

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MORE ABOUT

Mr. HALL CAINE'S

NEW NOVEL.

In our last issue we made an announcement which has doubtless been received with much satisfaction by the readers of *SHORT STORIES*. We were in the happy position of being able to announce the fact that we had been fortunate enough to secure the serial rights of Mr. Hall Caine's New Novel, and that it would appear exclusively in the pages of our new Magazine for Ladies which will appear on January 10th next.

"THE ETERNAL CITY" is one of those deeply engrossing stories which seem to hold the attention from first to last. Like most, one might say all, that this popular Novelist has written, this new work is of intense human interest; it is a story which will be much talked about, and doubtless there will be no little controversy on its account, but all will admit that underlying it are problems of vital importance to humanity, problems which have through the ages engaged the earnest thought of all social reformers.

As in "The Christian," there is a romantic side to "THE ETERNAL CITY." We think it will be generally acknowledged when this story is given in full, that it is the finest thing Mr. Hall Caine has yet written, and those who have read any of his works will know that that is saying a good deal.

Remember, there will be a large instalment in the first issue of "THE LADY'S MAGAZINE," which will be on sale on January 10th. Order at once, as there will only be a limited edition.

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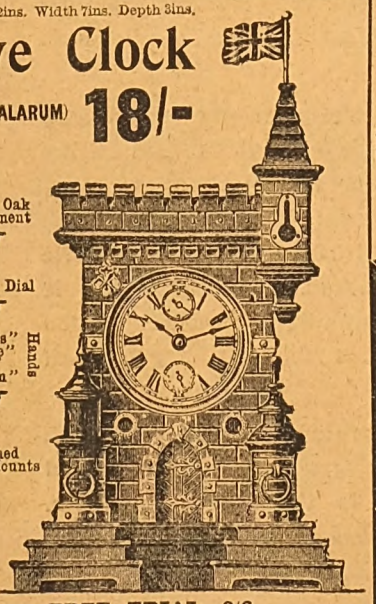

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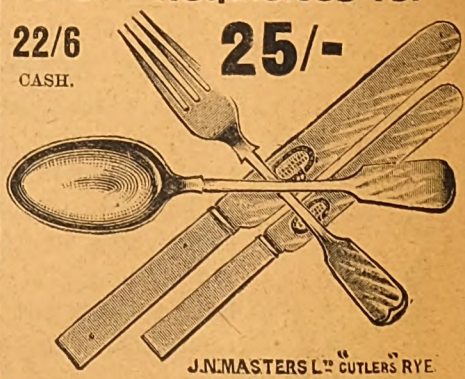

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SHORT STORIES

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No. 630. FOR WEEK ENDING JANUARY 26TH, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

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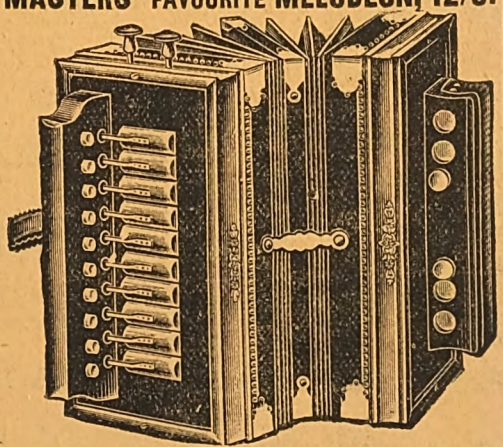

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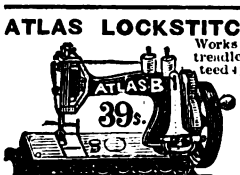

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SHORT STORIES

No. 630.] For the Week Ending January 26th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

MY FIRST APPEARANCE ON ANY STAGE.

ALTHOUGH my infancy and earlier childhood was passed in somewhat of a nomad existence, I am not, dear reader, the offspring of strolling players, as the title of my story and this explanation might lead you to suppose, neither was I born in a gipsy's tent.

At the time to which this story refers my father held a captain's commission in a marching regiment. I was the firstborn, and at that time only child of my parents, the apple of their eye, their chief source of joy and satisfaction.

I was duly dandled, and cuddled, and cooed to by fond mother and attentive nurse.

I was—like most other infants—inflicted on all my parent's friends, and even casual visitors. I was magnificently apparelled, and young ladies consulting my mother about a child's stall at a coming bazaar, left our house in confused astonishment at the number and variety of articles absolutely necessary for a baby's wardrobe, and doubtless inwardly and fervently thanked Heaven they had nothing to do with children, as a complete bazaar full of things seemed necessary for the outfit of a single infant.

How could it be that more articles connected with the proper rigging out of "baby" were not sent? and why? oh why! were there not more purchasers of those useful and dainty things?

I had just completed the first year of my existence, had cut several teeth with singular success, having avoided everything in the nature of fits by letting off steam in continuous kicking and screaming, pronounced at the time an excellent sign of a sound constitution and healthy lungs.

I was, what is called, a fine, promising boy, and from a family point of view, satisfied my parents' highest aspirations; had they heard my nurse express herself, as she frequently did, as to "the fractiousness of that screeching baby as has near wore me out," much solemn denunciation of her wicked untruthfulness, and even instant dismissal, would, I feel convinced, have been the immediate result.

At the time, then, that I had travelled about a year along the road towards the grave, my mother was in a very weak state of health, and suffered a perfect martyrdom from neuralgia, that subtle and agonizing tormentor of nervous and delicate women.

The house we lived in, and in fact, the whole town where we were stationed was somewhat low-lying and rather damp; a change to higher ground and a more bracing atmosphere had therefore been recommended by the family physician, and my father, having obtained a short leave, was about to take advantage of a long-standing invitation from some friends in Wales, which would afford my mother the desired change, while my father hoped to get some good shooting over a well-preserved manor.

Part of the plan, which much distressed my poor mother, was that I, the infant prodigy and sole representative of "the family," was to be left behind to the care of my nurse, in order that the "rest and quiet," so essential to the cure of neuralgia, should be insured by my separation from my too fond parent, who doubtless owed much of the suffering she endured to her constant devotion to my refractory self during the noisy term of teething.

The time of departure had been arranged so that the travellers should catch a night express at a junction some five or six miles from the garrison town where we were quartered; this distance was to be accomplished in a roomy, close carriage, hired for the occasion from the nearest livery stable.

The lateness of the start, I verily believe, had been agreed upon, or at all events acceded to, by my mother with a view to my being asleep at the appointed hour, so that my tender attachment to herself should not receive the rude shock of separation at a time when my weeping and wailing would certainly follow my being

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left alone in the nest, and find an echo in her heart during her whole absence from home. At the last moment, instructions of the most complicated and intricate nature had to be imparted to nurse; a dietary table, list of forbidden fruit, and programme for the day had to be written out and pinned above the nursery mantelshelf, for constant reference and the proper guidance of the guardian of my valuable little person.

Need I say that those documents, and the instructions

I was duly dandled and cooed to by fond mother and attentive nurse.

so clearly set forth therein, were as obstinately ignored and consistently neglected as the most minute direction verbally given by the commander-in-chief of my nursery when at home. My nurse, when the missus had gone, was determined, in military parlance, to "stand at ease," and even "fall out," if so inclined.

Portmanteaux, gun-cases, hat and bonnet boxes, and indeed boxes of all kinds, were piled upon the fly in lofty confusion, long before my dear mother could be induced to leave—torn from, I believe, was her own expression—her darling fast asleep; little did she suspect, under the influence of a favourite soothing syrup, administered shortly before by faithful nurse, "to stop the squalling o' the young brat," as she meant to be "off duty" as soon as the drum-major—as she disrespectfully calls her mistress—turns her back, and not do any "sentry-go" that evening.

She is going to meet her own particular "Tommy Atkins," servant to one of the subalterns of the gallant 15th, and with him enjoy the pleasures of the town, and probably partake of shrimps and ginger beer in his sweet society, or—who knows?—even a glass of port wine and a bath bun, or such like delicacies, at some "restorong" or other.

When the fly, with its load of boxes, had got fairly on its journey, my father soon discovered that the pace somewhat resembled that of a snail with his shell on his back. The horses—regular old stick-in-the-muds at best—seemed much overweighted with the lumbering carriage and its heavy load of luggage; the road, being of clay and wet, was sticky to the last degree; and the driver seemed to have been behaving very differently from what was becoming in the staunch teetotaler of many years' standing he stoutly declared himself to be, to the accompaniment of many a naughty word. My father's peremptory commands to advance, issued with sharp military abruptness, and even his attempted eloquence in language scarcely parliamentary, had a slightly sobering effect on the driver, but failed entirely to stimulate the rigid joints and bare-ribbed frames of the worn-out cattle. The result of the frequent altercations was to drive my poor mother frantic with pain in her head, and the horses and fly into the station some ten minutes after the express had passed through.

More "language" from Jehu, mingled with insulting remarks about "folks keepin' the 'osses waitin' 'alf-an-hour after 'e was all ready to start."

My mother inwardly pleaded guilty to this accusation and, in consequence, tried to soothe the fervour of my father's wrath; she consoled and congratulated herself on her returning to hover once more over the couch of her sleeping and much worshipped cherub.

There was nothing for it but to turn round and make the best of the way back; my mother's head racked by the rattling and jingling of the windows and wheels of the fly, my father much in the condition of a threatening and grumbling volcano.

Arrived at last in front of their so recently quitted home, the luggage was soon returned to the house; and while my father was refusing to contribute anything towards the further refreshment of the driver—on what seemed to be a holiday or off-day from teetotalism—my mother entered the hall, to be confronted by a weeping housemaid, who ran up the kitchen stairs to admit her, having just realised the arrival, and had barely time to push Private Jones through the kitchen door into the area.

The cause of the weeping not being at all apparent, my mother was naturally much astonished and somewhat alarmed; every effort to get at the cause of this manifestation of grief was only rewarded by the girl becoming more thoroughly dissolved in tears than ever, till my father coming in and demanding to know the cause of this extraordinary scene, the lachrymose maid managed to sob forth:

"Oh, if you please, mum, cook 'ave gone out with her sergeant, and though nuss said as she were a-goin' out too, and ast me to listen if baby should cry. I heerd her come in agin, but can't find her nowheres in the 'ouse, and the blessed hinfant, if you please, mum, 'aven't cried a mossel since you left, mum!"

My mother and father both rushed upstairs to the nursery, overcome by the housemaid's story, when, what was their amazement, nay, horror, to find, not only the nurse absent, but the year-old darling of their hearts vanished, cradle and all!

Around lay my little night-clothes, appealing mutely to the rent hearts of my parents; clearly it was no ordinary mischief that the wretched woman—my nurse—was up to, but a premeditated and planned abduction of the vilest kind, and evidently prompted by the most sordid motives.

Further dismay and almost despair overwhelmed my parents, when they discovered drawers and wardrobes

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thrown wide, the contents in complete confusion and disorder; my best pelisse and other clothes gone, together with some valuable lace belonging to my mother.

Apparently, the fiend in human guise meant to sell me as the child of gentle though unfortunate parents, to some doting couple without a child of their own, and who would ask no awkward questions.

"Why, oh why!" cried my mother, "was I ever wicked enough to leave my darling to be stolen away and sold like a slave? I shall go mad! I shall go mad!"

My father seeing a piece of paper covered with writing near the fireplace, ran to pick it up, thinking it might give some clue to the whereabouts of the runaway and his boy.

Alas! it was but the remains of my menu, so tenderly prepared by my mother but a few short hours ago, part of which had already been used in lighting the gas.

Further questioning of the housemaid elicited renewed sobs and tears, but little else; all she knew she had told at first, except that she had seen the nurse talking to a soldier, whose face she did not see, in the street, just before she heard her come in.

The evident distress and fright of this girl at the disappearance of the child convinced my parents that she spoke the truth, and had no connection with, nor knowledge of, the abstraction of my lost self. This was more and more evidence of the sinister designs on my person of the guilty absentee. Was the soldier with whom she had been seen talking an accomplice? Had he levanted with her and her precious burden? The uniform was the only clue, and that would probably not remain long unchanged, for who knew what disguise? Where! oh where, could they have gone?

My mother, weeping and fainting by turns, is left to the care of the almost equally tearfully maid, while my father hurries off first to the barracks, where, with the aid of his soldier servant, hunts every nook and cranny of the quarters of both men and officers; the latter are all absent at an entertainment, given in a hall in the town, hired for the purpose, where proceedings are to wind up with a ball, and to which they have invited a number of residents in the neighbourhood. This entertainment and ball my father remembered when he reached the barracks, as he and my mother were to have taken an active part in the festivities, and, but for my mother's illness, would have been there at that moment. He saw now, that as a large contingent of the men, officers' servants, and others, would be taken down to assist in the arrangements, act as door-keepers, etc., how this night, of all others, would be selected as an opportunity for deserting by a clever villain, especially if he had the assistance of a woman who could procure clothes for purposes of disguise, such, for instance, as his own wardrobe might afford. Home again he rushes, frightening my poor mother afresh, as she runs to the door hoping for tidings of her lost darling, to throw open every drawer and cupboard; nothing is missing, but she must have hunted out some old clothes he had forgotten, or thought he had given away, fearing that newer things might be recognised or more easily remembered and described.

Off again, this time to the railway station, where porters and station-master had seen several women with children during the course of the evening, but not knowing his nurse, had not, of course, recognised her; had not noticed any child exceptionally well dressed, or smothered in valuable lace, of which they were no judges.

Many soldiers had likewise been on the platform, but were not particularly noticed as accompanying females carrying handsome boys; nobody in uniform had gone by rail that evening, or the booking-clerk would have

My father and mother both rushed upstairs to the nursery.

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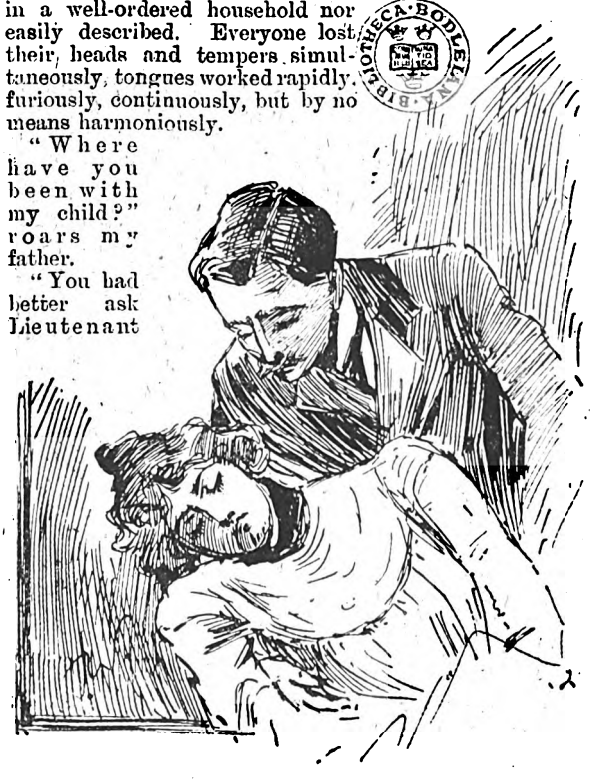
observed the fact. He *must* have been disguised, but inquiry failed to discover whether a man had taken two tickets, and who was accompanied by a woman and child; "woman and child would naturally wait on the platform while tickets were being taken by any man who was with them," the clerk said.

On to the police office, where a full, true, and particular description of the delinquent nurse and her frail charge are duly taken down in writing by the inspector on duty, with the additional information, "probably accompanied by a soldier of the 15th, in or out of uniform; to be confirmed, and name given, after roll-call to-morrow."

The only information gained at the police-station is that the policeman on the beat will probably know the nurse, by sight at all events, and a man shall be sent to cross-question him forthwith.

Back to the house my father wends his weary way, no news of nurse or child. My mother, by this time, being quite hysterical, my father goes sadly out to fetch the doctor. On his return he finds that cook has just come in, and after considerable fencing with the questions my mother has been able to put to her, has begun to sob violently; evidently she is not entirely ignorant as to the whereabouts of baby, and my father is about to open upon her in "real earnest" as our American cousins say, when a peal is heard from the front-door bell, and enter nurse, baby, cradle, and all! My mother made an effort to reach her lost child, but swooned on the way in her husband's arms. Then began, dear reader, such a scene as is neither frequent in a well-ordered household nor easily described. Everyone lost their heads and tempers simultaneously, tongues worked rapidly, furiously, continuously, but by no means harmoniously.



My mother swooned on the way in her husband's arms.

"Where have you been with my child?" roars my father.

"You had better ask Lieutenant Murray. Indeed it weren't my fault, sir; 'e would 'ave the loan of the blessed baby for his show."

"What! are you drunk or mad? What has Lieutenant Murray to do with my son, and at this time of night?"

"Go and ask him, and don't keep a-shouting at me as if you'd got the toothache!" was the impudent rejoinder, prompted, no doubt, by the insinuation about being drunk and the guilty consciousness of several glasses of negus to which she had been treated.

After this, further attempts to get at the cause of my absence from the parental roof-tree, with my nurse, only elicited impertinence from the latter, till she was peremptorily ordered to leave the house.

Where, think you, dear reader, had I been during all this terrible time of anxiety and temporary insanity on the part of my parents?

Why, I had been making my first appearance on the stage, before a very intelligent and appreciative audience, and received rounds of applause and the most flattering sympathy and attention.

I must now explain that the entertainment to be given by the officers of the 15th on this eventful evening, of which I have before made mention, included an amateur performance of a drawing-room drama, in which Lieutenant Murray was to enact the part of an interesting and fascinating widow, mother of a lovely infant, the posthumous offspring and sole heir of the late Sir Giles de Jasper.

At first it was intended that an empty basinette with a bundle of clothing was to do duty in the scene where the mother was occupied in watching the slumbers of the infant baronet.

Difficulties arose about the borrowing of the necessary article of furniture for stage use, and a "happy thought" occurring to Lieutenant Murray that my parents owned a baby, and therefore doubtless a cradle of some sort, quite a "knowing wrinkle" suggested itself to his mind, that as the captain and his wife would be absent from home, why not borrow baby as well, and so give additional reality to the scene and secure an extra share of applause to himself. No sooner had this "rare tip" enlightened the gloom of Lieutenant Murray's thoughts, than he immediately set about putting his plan into action. He distinctly remembered coming upon his servant walking out with my nurse Betsy on a fine Sunday evening some time before, so he forthwith summoned this useful functionary and at once began:

"I believe, Wilkins, you know Captain Dolby's nursemaid?"

"Yessir," was the prompt reply.

"Now, I want you to see if you can persuade her to let us have the loan of the baby's cradle for to-night's performance, and as the baby can scarcely sleep without his cradle, she might as well bring him down to the hall with it, and we could bring him on the stage, just for a minute or two, without disturbing him in the least; if he is asleep so much the better. Now, not a word of all this to anyone—anyone, do you understand, Wilkins?—as it is my own idea, and I want to create a bit of a surprise. None of the 15th must know whose child I have got, or it will get to the captain's ears, and then there will be the dickens to pay. I will give you money for a cab, and you must manage to smuggle the nurse and child into and out of the hall again without any one seeing them."

Wilkins tried to enter a mild protest, urging the difficulties of the task, and the danger of serious consequences to the girl if the escapade should ever reach

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Captain Dolby's ears. His master, however, calmed his fears, and talked down all opposition to his pet project. Wilkins then betook himself in due time to meet Betsy according to previous arrangement, as I have before indicated, and at once opened on the confidential scheme intrusted to him by his master. At first Betsy uncompromisingly refused to have act or part in the subtle device, declaring loudly:

"That no child as she had ever heerd on was that wushupped, spoilt, and fussed over as that there Dolby hinfant;" and added, to the sympathetic ears of Wilkins: "I do believe as the Prince o' Wales' nuss was not worrited by the Queen o' Hengland in the way as I have been by Mrs. Dolby. Why, I'm treated as if the young brat was the great Nawab himself and I was one o' his niggers; it ain't fit service for a Christian white woman."

Wilkins' arguments and persuasion would probably have met with little success had not Lieutenant Murray at that very moment passed, quite by accident, of course, on his way to the hall and added the weight of a cheerful and encouraging sentence or two, and the even more tangible weight of a golden argument.

From that moment nurse Betsy was one of the conspirators; she hastened home to array me in my best finery, and slipping quietly out of the house, to avoid being seen or heard by the housemaid, was soon in a cab at the end of the terrace with Private Wilkins, on her way to the "halls of dazzling light." By the time we had arrived at our destination I had resumed my rudely disturbed dreams, and was quietly taken to a small back room to await the call boy, and where nurse beguiled her time with the consumption of negus, which Lieutenant Murray sent by Wilkins for her special refreshment, rightly judging that if strong and sweet it would act as a powerful antidote to any qualms of conscience or fears of ulterior consequences.

She was soon as merry as a cricket, and had begun to take a real interest in the success of the evening's exploit.

At length the scene arrived, where the curtain was to rise disclosing Lieutenant Murray as the charming widow, hanging over the cradle containing the young *débutant* in the part of sleeping innocence.

Nurse was carefully kept in the background as a precaution against my identity being discovered, so Wilkins deposited me in my cradle, very gingerly, on the stage in a position where I should be in view, but protected as much as possible from draughts.

When the footlights were turned on and the curtain rose, I must have felt that the situation was not one in which I could, with due credit to myself and civility to the attentive audience, remain silent, so I began to crow lustily, which had the effect of bringing down the house with a torrent of applause, and likewise of much discomposing the expression suitable to my stage mother in her widowed condition.

She began to rock the cradle violently, as the applause had caused an ominous gloom to overspread my hitherto beaming countenance. The rocking and the frantic applause which followed this very natural effort of the mother to soothe her infant treasure immediately caused the gathering clouds to dissolve themselves in a shower, or rather a downpour of portentous magnitude. I further resented, with stentorian voice and convulsive kicks, the attempt on the part of Lieutenant Murray to lift me, which he did, like all young men, as if I had a tendency to come to pieces on being handled. This complete taking possession of the house by myself resulted in

Betsy hastened to array me in my best finery.

Wilkins being obliged to carry me to the little back room, where my nurse soon silenced and then calmed me to sleep with the aid of another dose of the invaluable soothing syrup. My appearance on the stage, and my performance there, though amusing enough features in themselves, robbed the piece of all interest, and the audience appearing restless, it was decided to curtail this part of the entertainment, and so dancing was commenced sooner than had been intended.

Now that I was fast asleep again, the nurse slipped out and watched the dancing from a side door for several hours, which accounted for her late return home. The consequences of her share in the transaction are already known to the reader, nor could all the pleading of Lieutenant Murray induce my mother to intrust again my precious little carcass to the care of "that thief of a woman," as she insisted on calling the nurse. Lieutenant Murray, although heavily punished by the failure of the play, and the fiasco and ridicule which resulted from his "happy thought," did not escape my mother's scathing accusation of lack of every feeling of humanity supposed to distinguish the conduct of civilized races. I question if she has ever quite forgiven him his share in the suffering and fright my temporary abduction caused, although he has since married her sister and proved himself an excellent husband and fond parent. My father could never be brought to see any humorous side to a stupid freak which had caused so much pain and anxiety. It will be seen from the foregoing narrative that "my first appearance on any stage," though creating a great sensation in more ways than one, was far from a success.

J. D. HUTCHESON.

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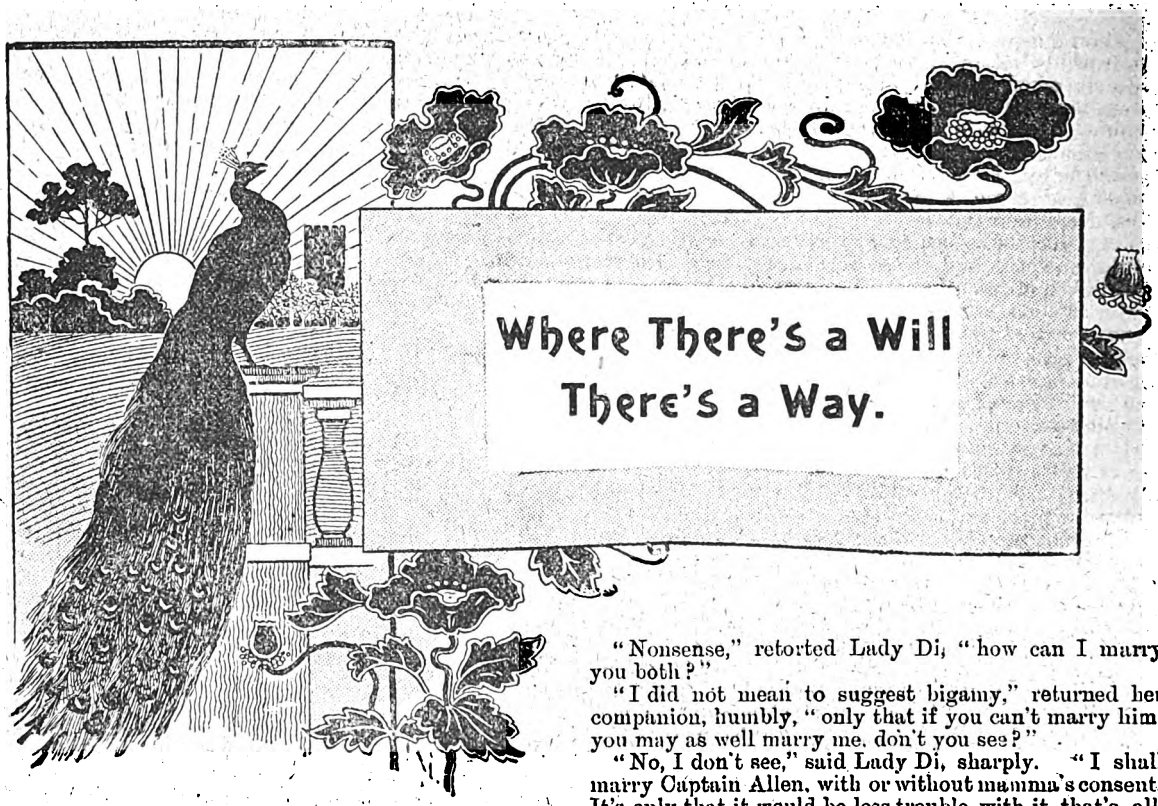

LADY DI CRAMPTON was giving her parents an immense amount of trouble and anxiety in more ways than one. To begin with, it was her third season, and she had not yet taken upon herself the bonds of matrimony, nor even the shackles of a satisfactory engagement. In addition to this, Di's mother had every reason to fear that her daughter had given her heart to a very charming but hopelessly impecunious young officer.

The Cramptons, like many other folk, were hampered by the lack of sufficient gold to carry on their style of living, and therefore had set their hearts on their daughter making a rich marriage, thus saving them from utter extinction in the present, and promising a comfortable security in the future. Now Di by no means lacked admirers, nor suitors for her hand.

Only one short week ago, she had refused a rich pork manufacturer, who with a noble generosity had laid his pigs and their profits at her feet. Of this proposal she had not dared to tell her parents, even begging her would-be lover to continue his visits as frequently as heretofore.

"Because," she told him naïvely, "they would be so angry if they knew that I had refused you."

At which the poor young man hardly knew whether to be offended or not, only that it was next to impossible to be long angry with Lady Di, so he wisely made up his mind to be friends, if he could be nothing nearer, finding out in the course of a few confidential chats upon whom she had set her wayward affections.

"He's so poor," she told him woefully, "They will never allow it."

"Poor little girl," he said tenderly, "it's hard lines. But there is always me to fall back upon you know."

"Nonsense," retorted Lady Di, "how can I marry you both?"

"I did not mean to suggest bigamy," returned her companion, humbly, "only that if you can't marry him, you may as well marry me, don't you see?"

"No, I don't see," said Lady Di, sharply. "I shall marry Captain Allen, with or without mamma's consent. It's only that it would be less trouble with it, that's all. Mr. Armytage, do you really care for me, as much as you tell me?"

"Of course I do," answered the young man earnestly, and the light that sprang from his honest blue eyes convinced Di of the truth of his words.

She placed her hand gently on his arm.

"Then I shall rely on you to help me if necessary," she said, getting up in answer to her mother's call to go and greet some visitors.

The season was drawing to a close.

Both Lady Di and her mother were looking pale and worn, the one with the constant anxiety to press upon her daughter the necessity of a rich marriage, the other from the continual resistance that she had to bring into force.

Just now it was a cotton manufacturer who had come forward with a request for Lady Di's hand, and unfortunately had spoken to her parents on the subject first, so Di had no chance of disposing of him as she had of the pig-owner.

Unluckily, too, he had with great skill discovered the scarcity of the gold coin, making a generous offer to advance the needful, and clear all deficits, should he be fortunate enough to win the young lady's hand. This placed Di very awkwardly, but it did not shake her decision to marry no one but the man she loved.

It merely helped her to make up her mind that what had to be done, had best be done quickly. Captain Allen naturally being of the same opinion, and Di being a young woman of resource, they formed a plan between them, and set about to put it into action as soon as they conveniently could.

So one evening, at a reception at her mother's house, Di electrified Mr. Armytage, by saying suddenly:

"I have promised to marry Captain Allen in a week's

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time. You must help me as you promised," passing on in the crowd before the astonished young man had time to reply.

Later on he had a few moments' talk with her.

"You will help me, Mr. Armytage?" she said.

"My dear Lady Di, I don't see how it can be done," returned the young man, almost gasping in his surprise. "A week is so short a time."

"Quite long enough," returned Di, "for our purpose. Come along, and get me an ice or something, and I will tell you all about it."

For a few minutes there was a low-voiced conversation carried on in a corner, much to the delight of Di's mamma.

Perhaps the pork man had still a chance, she thought.

Suddenly Di's companion broke into a hearty laugh.

"Capital—splendid," he exclaimed. "My sister will be only too charmed," and rising from his seat, he made his way across to Lady Crampton to bid her good-night.

* * * * *

It was a week later. The Cramptons' house was ablaze with lights. Through the down-drawn blinds could be seen the shadows of busy footmen and maids moving to and fro. The hostess and her daughter stood greeting their guests at the top of the staircase.

Di looked brilliantly handsome in her plain satin gown, only a single string of pearls encircling her slender throat. Her dress was perfect in every detail bar one. It was a curious fact that not once during the whole evening did anyone catch a glimpse of even the tip of a shoe peeping beneath the gown.

Perhaps the long dresses of the day partly accounted for it, but even in that case, when a lady has a remarkably pretty foot, she generally manages to let it appear somehow. But Di to-night had a reason for hiding her usually smartly-shod understandings. She had "patent" leather boots on.

A couple of hours passed, and Lady Crampton's guests began to depart. No one noticed that a certain satin-clad figure had disappeared.

"Good-bye, goodbye; so delighted to have seen you." "Delightful evening," and so on were the remarks made, as they thronged down the staircase.

"Where is Di? Oh, downstairs I expect," replied Lady Crampton, as some friend inquired for her. "You are sure to find her there. Goodbye."

All was confusion in the hall, as well as outside, for everyone was waiting for their cab or carriage. In the midst of it, a slim figure in a long ulster and squashy felt hat slipped by from somewhere, springing on to the empty box of a smart-looking hansom cab.

I do not fancy anyone had time to notice what a very smart pair of boots the young cabman wore, for a lady and gentleman umped in almost before he had gathered up the reins, and with a plunge the spirited little mare went off at a quick trot.

"All right there?" questioned a soft voice through the trap door.

"All right," answered Armytage and his sister, and in less than twenty minutes they drew up at the kerb, got out of the cab, and prepared to help the driver from his elevated position.

But someone was before them.

Jack Allen had the slight figure folded tight in his arms, and perhaps it may be forgiven if poor Armytage felt a pang as he mounted his seat and drove slowly round to his own stables.

The next morning, as Lady Crampton was sitting up in bed, eating her breakfast, her maid brought her the following letter:

MY DEAR MOTHER,—I hope my maid gave you my message last night. It was quite true. I *had* a headache, and I wished to save you all anxiety should you miss me. By the time you get this I shall be Mrs. Jack Allen, as we are to be married at eight o'clock to-morrow, or rather this morning. I am staying the night with Mr. Armytage's sister, who has been most kind.

I am sorry to disappoint you, and hope one day you will forgive, Your affectionate daughter, DI.

GRACE COOMBE.

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The War with the Ghurkas, the Pindaris and the Last Mahratta War.

(1813-1817.)

ALTHOUGH the year 1813 found our vast Empire in India still undergoing the process of consolidation, the great native feudatory powers were beginning slowly to perceive that a continuance of our rule insured not only the independence, but the prosperity of their respective countries.

Law and order, however, being utterly distasteful to the mountain tribes, who lived by warfare, their subjection became necessary for the pacification of India.

In 1813 the Ghurkas of Nepal were peremptorily called upon to evacuate some lands—of which we were the Suzerain power—they had annexed. On their retirement their places were filled by the police. But the Ghurkas had only retreated to organise their forces, and shortly after, again took possession of the occupied districts, driving out the police.

War was then declared, and Nepal invaded at several points. General Ochterlony with 6,000 native troops was ordered to the hill country.

General Gillespie with 3,500 troops, 1,000 of whom were British, was to push from Meerut, and skirting the mountains to keep in touch with the first column. General Wood was to invade from the east with 3,000 natives and 1,000 British, whilst another force of 3,000 under Major Larter, was to support our ally the Raja of Sikkim against attacks from the Ghurkas.

A few insignificant successes won by General Ochterlony were followed by a grave disaster. General Gillespie, finding his march obstructed by a hill fort called Kalanga, manned by a mere handful of the enemy, tried to capture it and failed. In two assaults we lost over 500 men and General Gillespie was killed.

The force then waited for their artillery. After a breach had been made in the walls the order was given not to load the muskets but to carry the fort by the bayonet alone. This led to another disaster. When we got inside we found our progress checked by the *débris*. Before we could retire the enemy opened fire killing a great number.

Wiser counsels then prevailed, and we did what we ought to have done at first. The job was handed over to the artillerymen, who quickly laid the fort in ruins. Gillespie's force then attempted to join Ochterlony and passing another fort on the road called Jaitak, again tempted fortune, only to be repulsed with heavy loss. But these were not the only reverses we sustained.

General Wood, after being checked in an attempt to carry a stockade by storm, was induced to believe that the enemy was in such strong force as to render it hazardous for him to advance further.

General Marley's plans, too, were deranged in consequence of two detached posts of 500 men each he had left behind without supports being cut to pieces.

Then Amir Khan, the Pathan Chief, assembled his warriors. Lahore too, began to swarm with the soldiers of the great Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh.

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The Pindaris, too, a central India tribe of robbers, whose plundering proclivities had been kept in check, threatened hostilities, and Amir Khan, who was only twelve marches from Delhi, was said to have in readiness a force of 30,000 sturdy fighters and 125 guns.

But the Government never quailed. Our statesmen faced the situation, bad as it was, with unshrinking firmness. Reinforcements were sent up without stint, and orders given for an immediate advance on Nepal. The men rejoiced, for they were burning to avenge their defeats, but the officers hung back. They feared the hills.

Then at the very moment when our fortunes seemed at their darkest, the clouds suddenly cleared. The Pindaris instead of fighting us began fighting amongst themselves.

A quarrel broke out between the Amir Kabul and Ranjit Singh, whilst Scindia relinquished his design because his generals could not agree on a plan of campaign.

The danger of an Anti-British combination for a time averted, the war was renewed. A feint was made against the western powers. The Nepalese province of Kumaun drew off so many Ghurkas that Ochterlony, although opposed by the ablest of the Ghurka chiefs, Amir Singh Kapa, was able to capture the fort Nalagarh. He then boldly entered the mountains and stormed Rangari, another fort built on the top of a mountain 4,600 feet above the sea.

The Ghurkas with their long heavy knives were formidable opponents. At the outset of the war they were able, owing to their daring and extraordinary agility, to creep under our bayonets, and once inside the ranks the deadly knife was plied without mercy.

But the British soldier is nothing if not adaptable. He is willing to learn and always profits by experience. As soon as our men had learnt how to stop the wild rushes of their agile little foes, they drove them from point to point.

Whilst Scindia, having healed the differences between his generals, was conspiring again, our brave fellows were carrying everything before them. All the Ghurka villages, Ryla, Deonthal and Malaur, fell in quick succession. The fall of Malaur so disheartened the Nepalese that they sued for peace.

We took over a big slice of hill country, presented the Raja of Sikkim with a large district, and compelled the Nepalese to receive a British resident at Khatmandu. It was from the Ghurkas that we obtained possession of those southern slopes of the Himalayas which provide the civil and military services with the highland resorts of Simla, Landaur and Naini Tal.

The Nepalese treaty signed, we were free to deal with the Mahrattas, but the Governor General, Lord Hastings, deemed it better to crush the Pindaris first before settling scores with the Mahrattas. The Pindaris were robbers pure and simple. Strangers in the land to this extent that they were not connected with other races either by blood or religion, they were especially dangerous on account of the welcome they afforded all the outlaws and criminals of India.

Such ancestry as they had was to be found in the dregs of the Mogul Empire. Their headquarters were at Malwa, the richest part of central India, and though they gained a livelihood by plunder they committed their depredations on such a large scale that their principal chief, Amir Khan, boasted a well-equipped army supported by a powerful artillery.

The force they were able to put in the field when they became aware of our intentions so rapidly increased that our Government sent against them the largest army ever seen in India. It comprised 81,000 infantry, 10,000 cavalry, and 23,000 irregular troops. This large force so over-awed Scindia, who had been secretly promising to come to the aid of the Pindaris as soon as hostilities commenced, that when the Governor General, the Marquis of Hastings, who headed the army, after listening unmoved to the protestations of loyalty, suddenly produced a treaty and called on him to sign it, he dared not refuse.

To be compelled to furnish a contingent for the subjection of the very people he had sworn to support was a bitter pill. He told his officers before they started that they might desert to the enemy if they chose. But we had anticipated this by placing the Mahratta contingent under the command of British officers.

Dismayed by this desertion, Amir Khan at once submitted, offering to disband his freebooters if the British would allow him to retain the land he held from the Prince Holkar.

We agreed to these conditions, gave him five lakhs of rupees for his artillery, and as the security for the disbanding of his robbers took his son and heir as hostage.

But as this treaty only concerned Amir Khan himself, we attacked the other chiefs, stormed their camps, and broke up their organisation. We also forced Scindia to give up a noted chief, Wazil Muhammad, who had fled to Gwalior, and we totally defeated another chieftain, Chitu.

Deserted by his followers, this Chitu, after wandering about the country for twelve months, was killed when nearly dead with hunger by a tiger. The Pindari war was hardly concluded, when we found ourselves again embroiled with the Mahratta Princes.

Had these potentates been wise, they would have waited till the enormous army we had collected had been disbanded, but when we proceeded to insist on the Peshwa (who had never forgiven us for forcing him to sign, in 1802, the treaty of Bassien) signing a new treaty at Poona, which relieved the Gaikwar of Baroda from his control, besides forcing him to refer all disputes with other princes to our arbitration, he refused.

Under pretence of assisting us against the Pindaris he had largely increased his army. Now he proceeded to provision it. Suspecting his purpose, the British resident, Mr. Elphinstone, sent to Bombay for reinforcements and retired to Kirki. Here he was attacked without warning by an army of 18,000 men under Bappo Gokla, the Peshwa's general.

Our force under Colonel Burr only numbered 2,800 men, but they were quite undismayed when the Mahratta force, anticipating an easy victory, rushed on their thin red line which, after recovering from the charge, charged back in return with such vigour that the Mahrattas were sent flying in all directions.

This defeat so crushed the haughty Peshwa that when Colonel Smith, with a strong division of the army Lord Hastings had collected for the subjugation of the Pindaris, appeared off Poona, he found the Prince had left his capital during the night. Some of the soldiers laid down their arms, but a few fiery regiments offered a stout resistance. Those that preferred fighting to surrendering were annihilated. In those days war was war.

When we entered the capital we found eighteen cannon and a large quantity of stores. This defeat spread with lightning rapidity to all parts of India completely restoring our prestige.

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Drawn by] [C. Lawson Wood.

The Sepoys rushed valiantly forward, stormed the trenches, and drove the Mahrattas down the hill.

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The Peshwa's kinsman, the Mahratta Raja, instead of taking warning by what had happened, also defied the British. He had succeeded to his position on the death of the late Raja, whom he had poisoned, and he believed that a knowledge of this fact had made us resolve to depose him on the first opportunity.

The insolent manner in which he treated Mr. Jenkins, the Resident, caused that gentleman to fly to Sitabakli Hill in the centre of the city. He had with him two battalions of Sepoy infantry and some detachments of infantry and cavalry amounting altogether to 1,400 men.

The Englishman was not a moment too soon, for the last soldier had scarcely mounted Sitabakli Hill when the Raja, his army comprising 12,000 horse and 8,000 infantry, with 36 guns, appeared.

Mr. Jenkins having refused to capitulate a heavy fire was opened. The British, who were placed at the most vulnerable part of the hill, lost a good many men whilst the bombardment lasted; indeed, their losses were much more severe than the enemy supposed, for presently changing their tactics the bombardment was stayed to permit of the hill being stormed.

Time after time did the Mahrattas reach the crest of the hill only to be hurled back with tremendous loss. Instead of resting when night came the besieged employed the time in making fresh cartridges and intrenchments. Picks and shovels not being available the Sepoys were ordered to creep stealthily into the town and bring away anything likely to prove useful.

The following morning found the garrison stationed behind the most remarkable defences ever seen on a field of battle. Intrenchments composed of sacks of flour and grain, water-barrels, planks, old doors and all sorts of odds and ends affording cover.

At daybreak the attack was renewed with extraordinary fierceness. During the afternoon a tumbrel burst, causing such commotion amongst the Sepoys that the Mahrattas dashed up the hill, stormed the improvised intrenchments, drove out the Sepoys, and being reinforced, opened a heavy fire on our men who were stationed on another spur of the hill.

Our position was now more dangerous than ever. Menaced by the Mahrattas on the hill, and by the swarms encircling the hill on the other side, our men began to fall rapidly. Again the Mahratta Prince summoned us to surrender, and again we refused, although the cartridges made during the night were nearly all gone, and the provisions were running out.

What was to be done? Believing that destruction was only to be averted by some desperate action, Captain Fitzgerald asked permission to charge. It was refused. Later in the day the application was repeated.

"Tell Captain Fitzgerald," said Colonel Smith, "that he charges the enemy at his peril."

"At my peril be it," replied the dauntless Irishman.

Gathering his troopers around him, these splendid fellows cantered down the hill and then dashed headlong at the foe.

"Mad," said Smith, when he heard the news.

But the captain so far from being mad was extremely artful.

Two of the enemy's guns had wrought great havoc in our ranks and he meant to have them. Balaclava pales into insignificance before Fitzgerald's heroic ride.

A handful of men beset on all sides by thousands of foes thirsting for their blood, not only cut their way to where the guns were, but despite all the efforts of the Mahrattas, who at that time were the fiercest fighters in India, actually brought them back and got them to the top of the hill.

The Sepoys who witnessed this daring feat grew so excited, that when a tumbrel exploded amongst the Mahrattas a little later, they rushed valiantly forward, and drove the Mahrattas down the hill.

Resolved not to be outdone, the rest of this wonderful little army declared that the time had arrived for them to do something. Even Colonel Smith was infected by the general enthusiasm.

Regardless of the danger to which they would be exposed by giving up the hill, they charged right down into the serried masses clustering round the base, and although they had no cartridges, the bayonet was plied with such effect that the foe was completely routed.

With characteristic duplicity, the Mahratta Prince disowned all knowledge of the treacherous treatment of the British envoy, but when General Doveton arrived with large reinforcements the Prince was quickly made to understand that he must not only surrender but disband his army. He agreed to surrender, but refusing to disband both sides prepared for another fight.

So far our policy had been crowned with success. Two of the formidable Mahratta Princes had been deposed and only one remained.

Jeswart Holkar, Prince of Indore, who in 1805 was defeated by Lord Lake, died insane, leaving a favourite concubine, Talsi Bai, to rule the country during the minority of his son Mulkar Rao.

As soon as the Mahrattas heard that the British were coming, they abducted the infant Prince, killed Talsi Bai, and taking up a strong position on the banks of the Sipra, at Maidpur, which commanded the only ford for miles, they awaited the approach of Sir John Malcolm and the British.

The Mahrattas knew the daring of the British soldier but they never dreamt that they would risk forcing a passage in the face of seventy pieces of artillery.

The surprise of the artillerymen when one man dashed into the stream was so great as to completely paralyse their aim. To minimise our losses we had extended our lines. Consequently when we closed up to attack the two wings of the Mahrattas closed in too. Cheered by the depth of their columns they fought marvellously well.

Time after time we charged into their ranks killing hundreds. But as they showed no signs of yielding, Sir John Malcolm sent a body of British infantry to their rear. Even then the brave Mahrattas faced about refusing to fly. When the ever-contracting iron circle we had thrown around them crushed out the resistance, we charged into the mass with the bayonet.

The shades of evening were drawing in when the Mahrattas, despairing of victory, burst through the cordon and took to flight.

We lost 778 killed and wounded. The Mahrattas over 4,000. The treaty of Mandassar concluded in 1818 reduced the Princes of the reigning house to the feudatory position the other Mahratta Princes had accepted. The chief of the Gwalior Mahrattas made one more effort to recover the independence of his state before finally tendering his allegiance to the British Crown. In 1843 Sir Hugh Gough, at the head of a small force, so completely routed 18,000 Mahrattas at the battle of Maharipore that, fully convinced of our superiority, the Mahrattas have ever since been as loyal as any of the other feudatory states of India.

(*Next week:* **The Two Great Burmese Wars of 1823-6 and 1854-6.**)

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PHILADELPHIA'S FOLLY.

PHILADELPHIA DACRE was a young woman with just that amount of self-assertiveness that goes to make the capable maiden of to-day.

That she was alone in the world was rather in favour of this peculiarity than otherwise, although it did not render her in any way hard or unsympathetic.

In the neighbourhood where she lived (artistic Chelsea), she contrived to find that indefinite something which almost invariably spells "home." A little flat consisting of a studio, and one other tiny room, in the quiet road that links riverside Chelsea with the more aristocratic South Kensington, had been her bread-winning and domestic refuge ever since the death of her father, her last surviving relative, four years before.

Twenty-three, and possessing a creditable reputation with the "West End" dealer as a reliable producer of pretty little pictures of a certain phase of metropolitan child life, she bid fair, by dint of hard work, and persistent study, to reach in time, if not the top of the tree, at least a modest perching-place amongst the mid-way branches.

The only child of a man of more than average talent as a landscape painter, whom years of continually increasing ill-health had alone served to keep him from realising his ambition, Philadelphia had inherited, in no small measure, her dead father's artistic gift.

Her Christian name, a peculiar one, had originated in the fact of her having been born in the "City of Brotherly Love," U. S., during a long visit of her parents to that place, where lived Mrs. Dacre's relatives, members of an old Pennsylvanian family.

It was owing, more especially, to mother and daughter having both first seen the light in the "Quaker City" that the former called her baby after their mutual birthplace, and certainly the quaintness of the name harmonised more than fairly well with the unconventional oddness of the girl.

Now, in most things Philadelphia was matter-of-fact to a fault, but in one little corner of her heart she had hidden away and cherished a fancy, a sunny dream that made her loneliness no loneliness at all. Her eyes saw, her ears heard things that, shadows though they were deeply contented her and made life endurable, and even worth the living.

This imaginative indulgence had a somewhat strange origin. She had remained long enough in the city of her birth to become acquainted with a boy of her own age; a friend and neighbour of the Philadelphia Dacres. Upon her quitting America for England, both were eleven or thereabouts. Having played together, and made common cause against domestic authority, a mutual feeling of friendship had established itself between them, and although young Olaf Schuster speedily forgot his companion, she, on her part, was faithful, even too worshipping point.

Young Schuster came of the old Pennsylvania Dutch stock, but, truth to say, was but a degenerate specimen of the race. As a boy he had been overbearing, mean, sly, but woman, be she little or big, is ever sadly inconsistent, and Philadelphia, patient, forgiving, blind to all shortcomings, was no better than the majority of her sisters, and grovelled in the dust before the young tyrant.

Thus it was now that in the solitude of her little domain, she weaved a romance, plot, persons, *denoument*, all so ideally imagined and elaborated, that no one, save the fair author, could possibly have reached to the height necessary for complete belief and understanding.

It is extraordinary what mere imagination will do for some people; with Philadelphia it had the effect of crowning, with a by no means limited halo, a young man absolutely non-angelic, and causing herself to regard this undoubtedly mythical divinity with a love altogether out of proportion to the object upon which it was lavished.

It was thirteen years or more since she had seen Olaf Schuster, and, having had no communication of any kind with him, never having even seen his pictured presentment, it was logically impossible that she could form a just conception of his person or character.

But, as I started out by saying, Philadelphia was no ordinary girl, and being what she was, and because, perhaps, of her isolated position and her surroundings, she had, unwittingly almost, given way to the temptation of creating an ideal, which, though utterly unlike the real, satisfied her heart-craving for something upon which to expend the mother-instinct of her nature; the love which would claim expression, be the object selected never so unsuitable or unworthy.

In Gains orough Studios, where she lived, a certain Gerald Laing, artist, Bohemian, and occasional contributor to journals devoted to the interests of his profession, had his painting-room, and bachelor quarters.

In spite, however, of his vagabond mode of life, he

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was a thoroughly good fellow, a hard worker, and a tolerably well-known painter of military subjects.

For long he had been in the habit of occasionally seeing Philadelphia flitting up and down the dim, bare staircase, although not knowing exactly who she was.

He admired her from the outset, not so much for her trim, natty little figure, nor, indeed, because she was fair to look upon, but for the one mysterious thing which is always so evident to the genuine worshipper of the idol, and which no other than the veritably right person is permitted to see.

One particular year Philadelphia had sent in to the Academy a picture which (wonderful for her) pleased herself, but which failed to evoke responsive sentiments in the hearts of a hard and unsympathetic Hanging Committee.

It was a larger canvas than she ordinarily ventured upon, and the day she fetched it away from Burlington House, she felt so tired and depressed that its weight seemed to her to be increased sevenfold as she toiled with it from the cab and up the stairway to her rooms.

It chanced that as she was going up, Gerald Laing was coming down. Her distress was so evident, that in a moment he had raised his hat, and had proffered his services in assisting her to carry the "rejected" up to the door of No. 17.

Philadelphia looked at him a second, keenly, as if "weighing-up" the offerer of aid.

Then she said, very cordially, and with just the suspicion of a demure little smile:

"Thanks, very much! If you will be so kind. Mr. Gerald Laing, isn't it? My name is——"

"Miss Dacre—Miss Philadelphia Dacre, isn't it?" he laughingly interrupted her.

"Quite correct, Mr. Laing, I am that unfortunate individual. It is a little bit strange, you know, that you and I should have lived on the same floor for more than two years, and yet never exchanged the ordinary greetings of near neighbours until this moment."

He said that it was; and also, it is to be feared, was unduly slow in "portering" the luckless picture to its inceptive source.

Pre-occupied as was Philadelphia she yet recognised and appreciated the young artist's favourable personality, gentle courtesy, and, (as it would be called to-day by the advanced school), his old-fashioned attention to the *convenances*.

Dismissing her self-appointed helper with a brief expression of thanks, emphasized with a nod and a smile, and safely landed in her own preserves, Philadelphia's proceedings were, to say the least, strangely inconsequent.

Before even taking off her hat and jacket, or making the slightest preparation for a meal, she unearthed from the bottom of a large trunk, a small, very small cash-box.

Sitting down in her basket arm-chair, with the box upon her knees, she opened it and began with nervous haste to count up the contents. It represented her savings for the past two or three years. A pitifully small heap of gold and silver, not more perhaps than forty p unds in all.

"I think it's enough. I do think it's enough," she said, half-aloud, and looking wistfully at the coins as they lay, a metallic medley, in her lap. "I can travel second cabin, and can be very careful about incidental expenses, and odds and ends. I've plenty of clothes, and when I arrive in Philadelphia, I shall be all right, for I can go to Aunt Judith's at once. Yes, I think it's enough, and—I'll chance it."

What was in her mind to do?

Just this—which ninety-nine out of a hundred English girls would vote hare-brained, not respectable unmaidenly.

She was going to cross the Atlantic, alone, unprotected, to see for herself if Olaf Schuster, her ideal, her hero, her dream-love, was ready to play his part in the drama she had created.

Wild-goose chase! fools errand! nay, she would none of it. Did not her whole soul respond ecstatically to Olaf's name?

She would go, whatever the risk, whatever the misunderstanding of motive her proceeding might excite in the minds of others. Other people's opinions troubled her but little, and, as her circle of acquaintance was comparatively small, she anticipated nothing of an unpleasant nature from that quarter.

Had such a thing been at all likely, it would not have deterred her, and so, her purpose being now fixed and unalterable, she dismissed from her mind any probable or possible objections.

Meanwhile, Gerald Laing had to confess to himself that he was conquered, that his heart had gone out, once and for ever, to the little lady of the "picture." The self-confession did not by any means distress him; rather did it result in pr found self-gratulation, and in an abandonment to a delicious and future-building train of thought.

Now and then, during the fortnight following his introductory meeting with her, he and Philadelphia ran up against one another; but the enthusiasm was all upon one side. He thought of no one, and nothing else but her; she, on the other hand, was so all-absorbed in her romantic fancy that poor Gerald and his newborn pass on, were counted as of no value and ignored accordingly. She easily detected the effect her mere presence had upon him, and, snailwise, immediately withdrew into her shell.

Still he hoped that a patient persistence would reap its reward; and he planned out a campaign, which he imagined must, by reason of its very boldness, both of conception and execution, force the other side to capitulate.

He indulged in this pleasant dream right up to a certain morning, when, without warning, his "Castle of Cards" came clattering down about his ears in ruinous fashion.

The old woman, who waited on the residential inmates of the Gainsborough Studios, a garrulous old soul, but honest withal, acquainted him upon bringing up his breakfast, and with many a beck and finger punctuation, that Miss Dacre had left early that morning, with a cab-load of baggage, for Liverpool Street, and that her boxes, were labelled "Passenger to New York."

Mrs. Filliboy will not soon forget the way in which Gerald Laing received the news.

Starting up, rocket-quick, out of his chair, and walking excitedly up and down the room for five minutes, he stopped abruptly in front of the old gossip.

"Where's she gone? Only an hour ago? Look here, Mrs. Filliboy, run up, like a good soul! and see if you can't find any scrap of paper lying about with an American address upon it. Never mind my breakfast, woman! Go! and I'll give you—give you—anything, if you only find something!"

"Lor bless you, Mr. Laing! don't frighten a body so; why, I can't read writin', sir, and besides, I shouldn't like to use my key, seeing as Miss Dacre has locked

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up her place for four solid months, so she said, and me only to go in once a week to clean up a bit."

Nothing was found, and Gerald was at his wit's end to account for this sudden and inexplicable action of Philadelphia's.

Then a bright thought struck him.

It so happened that just about this time he was taking a brief and well-earned rest after a long spell of special work, the painting of a series of large military frescoes in the country house of a retired army-officer of high rank.

This commission had put a large sum of ready money in his pocket, and, determined several weeks before to take a holiday upon the completion of his task, he now decided that he would follow his lady-love across the Western Ocean, trusting to the chapter of accidents, and a due exercise of mother-wit in the way of inquiry, to discover a clue to her whereabouts.

That she might possibly resent such an energetic style of wooing was far from occurring to him, while any idea as to the pre-engagement of her affections never even entered into his head.

Anyway he made up his mind there and then to go, and at once, and forty-eight hours later found him on board the White Star liner *Barbaric* steaming merrily down the Mersey towards the sea.

Now that he had some definite object in view, and that he was fairly launched on his quest, he was to a certain extent happy. He hated to think of Philadelphia as making this long journey alone and without adequate protection.

He of course was altogether unaware that she possessed relatives or friends in America, and only thought how he might be a shield between her and the dangers his too anxious mind conjured up as strewing her path.

* * * * *

The *Barbaric* duly arrived at New York and discharged her passengers at the Company's Pier.

Gerald, intent only upon getting ashore as quickly as possible, in order that he might commence his search without delay, shouldered his portmanteau, and impulsively hurried down the gangway.

A perfect stranger to America and its ways, he is jostled hither and thither in his efforts to find an exit into the streets, and a conveyance to some hotel.

He is just upon the point of addressing an official, when his eyes encountered a grey-cloaked little figure, recognisable to him amid ten thousand.

Dropping his portmanteau, and shouting to a coloured boy to stand by it, he elbows his way to where the girl stands.

"Miss Dacre!"

"Mr. Laing!"

"Of course you're surprised!—you couldn't be otherwise. But—er—business—er—sudden and important business—"

She looked him through and through with those keen, grey eyes of hers; but he flinched never a whit, although his heart beat nineteen to the dozen.

"Yes," he continued, a trifle more coherently, and also, it must be confessed, not a little mendaciously, "I wanted a holiday, and thought a month's run through the States would be a splendid experience."

"Mr. Laing," said Philadelphia, knitting her brows, and regarding the big, good-looking criminal with almost legal severity, "you're not speaking the truth. I'm sure you're not! Now, are you?"

"Well—you see—I—er—thought—I mean I—er—imagined that—there! I can't brazen it out, Miss Dacre—Philadelphia. I was so fearful for you, so upset at the idea of your being exposed to insult or annoyance—danger even—that I couldn't help coming after you to—well—offer my services again."

By this time they had drifted away from the press, and were standing in a comparatively quiet corner.

She glanced up at him. His honest eyes, with an eager, pleading look in them, met hers.

"What," she said, "if I decline them?"

"In that case I could have no more to say."

"But you must admit that it is all very presumptuous on your part. You won't deny that."

"I'll admit anything and everything, and confess myself the great culprit you deem me, if you will only——"

"Well?"

"Have mercy upon me—treat me as a first offender, and—give me another chance."

The form of her answer to this appeal is immaterial, inasmuch as the effect was satisfactory. That much, at least, may be placed upon record, without hurting anybody.

Then she told him, with many a word of self-accusation for her unreasonable folly, the whole story, and how it was that she was there that day, preparing to embark for home.

It seems that her disillusionment was so complete as it was commensurate with her arrival in Philadelphia.

Mrs. Judith Dacre, astonished, naturally, at so unexpected a visit from her niece, had things to say, before even a question was asked, of Olaf Schuster, that, once and for ever, awoke the girl from her silly dream.

It is unnecessary to go into details, sufficient that the crooked nature of the boy had developed, in manhood, into absolute evil. An outcast from family and friends, he lived but to be a disreputable burden upon those who should have been able to look to him for comfort and affection in the evening of their days.

This being so, Philadelphia determined at once to return to England and her duties.

Her meeting with Gerald probably gave the right turn to her thoughts at the right moment, and prevented her from indulging in that morbid self-abasement which such a nature as hers would undoubtedly have given way to.

* * * * *

The *Gallic* is warping slowly into dock.

It is nine p.m., and the lights of Liverpool twinkle a welcome to the home-coming travellers.

In the crowd, waiting the shipping of the gangway, is a young couple, she with her hand upon his arm, in all the pride and trustfulness of love.

"At last!" he says, bending down from his "six feet, one," to whisper in his little companion's ear. "You'll keep to your word as to the day?"

"What day?"

"The wedding-day."

"Oh! I'd forgotten all about it!" and she laughed roguishly.

"Forgotten it?"

"Well, if I had, you would soon have made good my memory."

"Then, my services are still in request."

"I suppose so."

And Philadelphia really meant it.

RALPH ENDERBY.

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FITTING FACE COMPETITION.

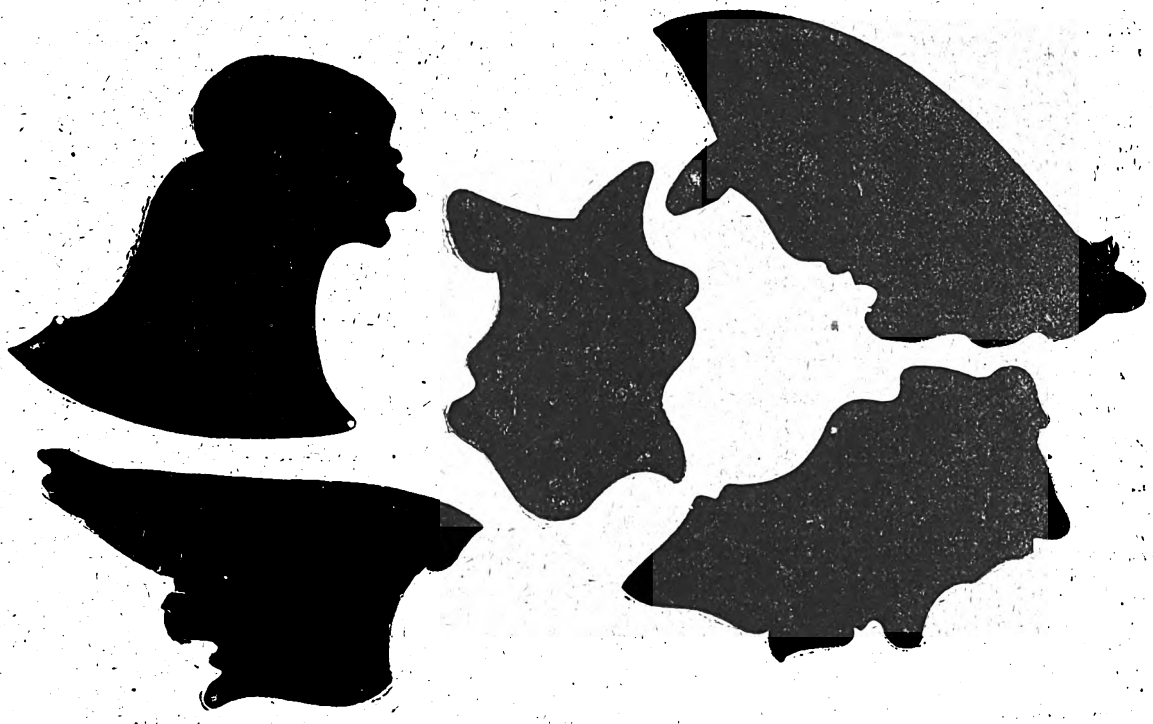
1st PRIZE - - - £1 1s.
2nd to 10th PRIZES - - "A Maori Maid,"
By Harry B. Vogel.

Cut out the five silhouettes below, and then place them together so that they form the head of a man. The portions may overlap each other if necessary.

Send your attemps in an envelope marked "FACE" to the Editor, "Short Stories," Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., to arrive not later than first post on Tuesday, February 5th.

The prizes will be given to the competitors from whom we receive the correct, or most nearly correct, solutions.

The Editor's decision is final, and competitors must only enter on that understanding.



RESULT OF THE "LOST WORD" COMPETITION.

No competitor was fortunate enough to send in a correct attempt in this competition. There were four who sent in lists with fourteen errors, and the first and second prizes have been added together and divided equally among them. The third and fourth prizes were awarded to competitors who had fifteen mistakes:

J. J. Robinson, 60 Sherrard Road, Forest Gate, E.; M. A. Williamson, Verona House, Peterhead; F. J. Carter, 26 Regina Road, Tollington Park, N.; Miss B. Brett, Cleeve, near Cheltenham; T. Nicol, 70 Clova Road, Forest Gate, E.; R. A. N. Smyth, Hillfield, Dorchester Road, Weymouth.

Consolat on gifts have been awarded to the following:

J. W. Rushmore, 86 Foster Hill Road, Bedford; Mrs. F. C. Thomas, 84 St. Helens Road, Swansea; T. C. Williamson, 56 Prince Street, Peterhead; W. Tucker, 15 York Road, Stony Stratford, Bucks; Josh D. Watts, Kildare, Lower Edmonton; G. Loughurst, Ludlow Road, Guildford, Surrey; Miss E. Randall, Bath Road, Swindon; C. H. Poynter, 23 Exmoor Road, Southampton; E. Marshall, Kingston-by-Sea, Brighton; A. W. Adams, 355 Stapleton Road, Bristol.

LIST OF WORDS IN THE "LOST WORD" COMPETITION.

1. Cottage
2. Pond
3. Roses
4. School
5. Children
6. Gate
7. Church
8. School.
9. Sign.
10. Aprons
11. Roses
12. Ivy
13. Dog
14. Spot
15. Two
16. One
17. Roof
18. Shot
19. Shell
20. Doors
21. Walls
22. Leaves
23. Branches
24. Plant
25. Cloud
26. Bark
27. Rose
28. Curtain
29. Window
30. Out-house
31. Chair
32. Steps
33. Arch
34. Flowers
35. Leaves
36. Plants
37. Path
38. Stone
39. Explosion
40. Hands
41. Grass
42. Arms
43. Cottage
44. Prop
45. One
46. Water
47. Sign
48. Saw

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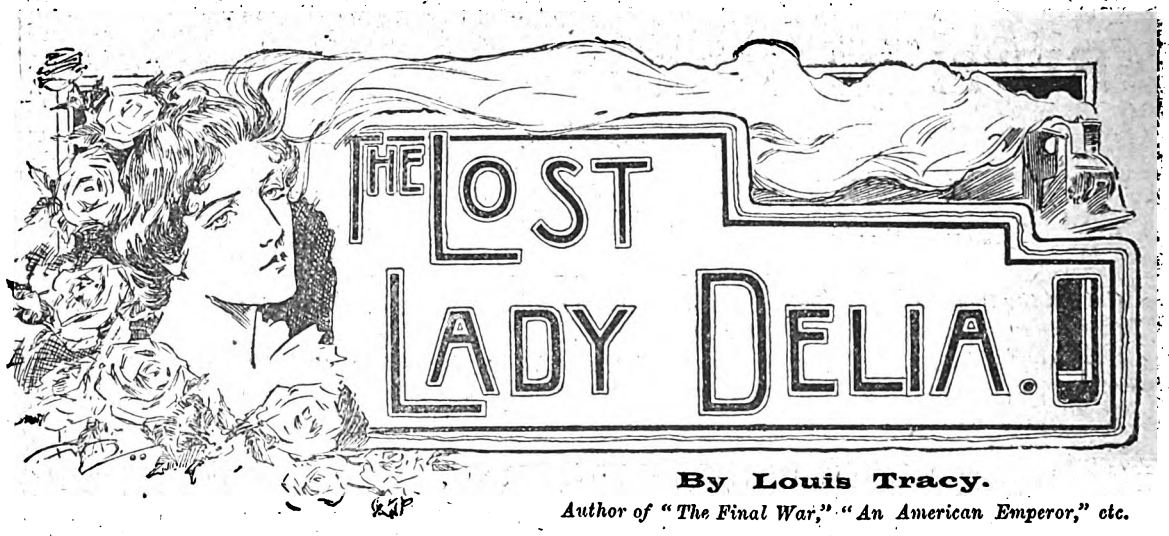

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

READ THIS BEFORE YOU BEGIN.

LADY DELIA LYLE leaves her house one foggy November afternoon, saying she is going to see her sister at Richmond, but from that time she is not heard of.

Her husband, Sir Charles Lyle, puts the matter into the hands of detectives, Inspector Winter taking charge of the case.

Reginald Brett, a barrister friend of the Lyles, also promises to do all he can, and he finds out that Lady Delia, on the night of her disappearance, instead of going to Richmond, alighted at Sloane Square, and went to a block of flats called Raleigh Mansions.

Towards the end of the month the body of a woman, evidently murdered, is found wedged beneath a drain-pipe in the Thames at Putney, and, though Sir Charles does not identify the body, Brett imagines it to be that of Lady Delia. Shortly after this discovery Lady Delia's maid, Jane Harding, disappears. She is afterwards found to have gone on the stage.

Brett now starts investigations at Raleigh Mansions, and he fixes on two residents there as being likely to have been connected with Lady Delia. These are a Mr. Sydney H. Pyne, who is not at present in residence, and a Mrs. Hilmer, whom he finds to be Pyne's sister.

It had transpired that Pyne had gone to Monte Carlo, and thither Brett goes, and he discovers that though letters are addressed to Pyne at the Hotel du Cercle, he is not known there.

During his stay at Monte Carlo Brett becomes acquainted with an Englishman, named Albert Mensmore, whom he helps out of some money difficulties, but he does not discover anything about Pyne.

After his return Brett finds out that Sir Charles Lyle knows Albert Mensmore, but in what connection does not transpire.

A few days later Brett goes into the City, to the office of Dodge and Co., with whom he had had some speculative dealings, and from remarks made by Mr. Dodge, he thinks that Pyne and Mensmore must be one and the same man.

CHAPTER XIII.

A QUESTION OF PRINCIPLE.

"IF anyone calls, I'm out," cried Brett to his factotum, as he crossed the entrance-hall of his well-appointed flat, and flung open the door of his library.

"The guvnor's in a tantrum," observed Smith to his wife, and he settled himself to renew the perusal of Grand National training reports. He had just noticed the interesting fact that last year's winner had "jumped in for the last mile" in a gallop given to a rank outsider, when the electric bell upset his calculations.

"My master is out," he said, as he opened the door to find Mr. Winter standing on the mat.

He was about to close the door again, but the detective planted his foot against the jamb.

"Your master is not out," he answered. "I saw him come in a minute since. Tell him Mr. Winter wants to see him."

Smith's dignity was superb. "My master may be in," he cried, "but he told me to say he was out to callers."

"Tell him what I say at once," and Mr. Winter gave the other his best, "accessory-after-the-crime" glance.

"I don't see why I should," snarled Smith, but the squabble ended when Brett's voice was heard:—

"Show him in, Smith, but admit nobody else."

With an air of armed neutrality Smith ushered the representative of Scotland Yard into the library.

"You're not looking very well, sir," said Winter, his round eyes fixed on Brett with all their power.

"Was it to ask about my health that you came, Winter?"

"No, sir, not exactly. But I haven't seen you for quite a while, and as we are both interested in the same matter I thought I would look you up and compare notes."

Brett was annoyed at the interruption. He wanted to think, not to be bothered by official theories. He looked hard at Mr. Winter, wondering whether he should tell him all he knew and wash his own hands clear of the investigation in future. But there was a second picture before his mental eyes. He saw Phyllis Browne's face, not as it was that day at the Tir aux Pigeons, but with the light of happiness in it, with the joyousness of requited and undisturbed love, with the glow reflected from dancing waves, and the tremulous smile of innocent pleasure.

It was hard to believe that such a woman could place her heartfelt trust in a man who was possibly a cold-blooded murderer. Such a combination was unnatural and horrible. Already Brett was beginning to doubt the evidence of his analytical senses.

Mr. Winter meanwhile flattered himself that the other was trying to read his thoughts by looking at him fixedly.

"I have been away from home," said Brett at last. "I had occasion to go to the South of France."

"I thought so. I was sure of it. How do you manage always to get ahead of us?" Mr. Winter was enthusiastic in his admiring divination.

"You have heard about Sydney H. Pyne?" said the barrister, still keeping that inscrutable, calculating gaze upon the policeman.

"Yes. I am on his track. We may be slow, but we are sure in Scotland Yard. May I ask what luck you have had, sir?"

"In what respect?"

"As if you didn't go to Monte Carlo to find Mr. Pyne yourself! Really, Mr. Brett, the scent is too hot this time. You might as well give a 'View halloa' if you have seen him."

"Seen Sydney H. Pyne, you mean?"

"That's the gentleman."

For an instant Mensmore's future trembled in the balance. Brett almost framed the first words which would have led to his immediate arrest at the next port touched

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by the *White Heather*. But the memory of Phyllis Browne, of her agony, of the fearful scandal that must fly through society on the Riviera, restrained him. There was no hurry. He must have time to think.

"I certainly went to Monte Carlo to discover the identity of that interesting personage, but I came back, Mr. Winter, as wise as I went. The only trace I found of him was an undelivered letter awaiting him at the Hotel du Cercle."

"A letter! Wasn't he there?" Mr. Winter's face, notwithstanding its official decorum, betrayed its disappointment. This was an unlooked-for check.

"He had been there. Other letters came for him earlier, and he had received them."

"But the hotel people——"

"Did not know him. In fact, there cannot be the slightest doubt that Mr. Pyne concealed his identity at Monte Carlo under another name."

"It doesn't matter much," growled the detective. "We will nab him all the same, if he had fifty names."

"Possibly. But it is wonderful how a man may be under your very nose, and yet you may miss him."

During the next few minutes neither man spoke. Brett smiled cynically at the thought that he was actually shielding Lady Delia's probable slayer from the minions of the law. He marvelled at himself for his irresolution. Nevertheless, he would wait. Mensmore could not escape him now. Perhaps the business might be managed without the dramatic features that would accompany an arrest forthwith. And there were some things that yet required explanation. If his Monte Carlo acquaintance really killed Lady Delia, then he was the strangest criminal that Brett had ever encountered during the course of his varied career.

The policeman misinterpreted his expression.

"You can't laugh at us this time, Mr. Brett," he cried. "Scotland Yard and yourself evolved the same theory, eh, and we can't fly off to the south of France as readily as you."

"Your skill is profound, no doubt. Indeed, I wonder at it, considering the mysterious way in which the missing man left his address at a post office."

The other reddened. "That was simple enough, I know; but we got on his track before that."

"By watching me when I visited his sister."

"You saw me outside the Jollity Theatre, then?"

"Of course. What did you expect?"

Mr. Winter recovered his placidity. "There's no use quarrelling about it, Mr. Brett," he laughed. "I did get that wrinkle from you. But how on earth were we to know what to do, when there were seventy-one flats occupied by respectable people, and one closed for months, the caretaker told us."

"I hope you have ceased your surveillance so far as I am concerned."

"Honour bright, sir. I won't do it again. Besides, we must lay hands on Pyne sooner or later."

"What steps are you taking?"

"The Monte Carlo police are making inquiries. They have his description. It has also gone to America."

"Why America?"

"Because he spent some time there. He only returned from the States early last year. His sister had not seen him for years, and a rare old row they had when he turned up. He had not much money, so she helped him, and he settled down for a time in the same mansions as herself."

"Who told you all this?"

"Mrs. Hilmer, and a precious lot of trouble she gave me. She is a clever woman, that."

"It was rather too bad to pester her about it, poor lady."

"I only followed your lead, sir."

This was so true that Brett changed the conversation.

"What sort of a man is Pyne? Have you his description?"

"Yes. Here it is." Mr. Winter produced a copy of the POLICE GAZETTE, a publication never seen by the public, but of large circulation among the police of the United Kingdom. The details were fairly accurate as to Mensmore's personal appearance, but there was no photograph. Oddly enough, Brett was relieved to note this serious deficiency.

"You did not get his picture?"

"No. Mrs. Hilmer declared that she had not a single photograph of her brother in her possession."

"Did she—tell you his real name?" the barrister had almost said, but he deflected the question. "Did she give you any hint as to a possible cause for this apparently unnecessary crime?"

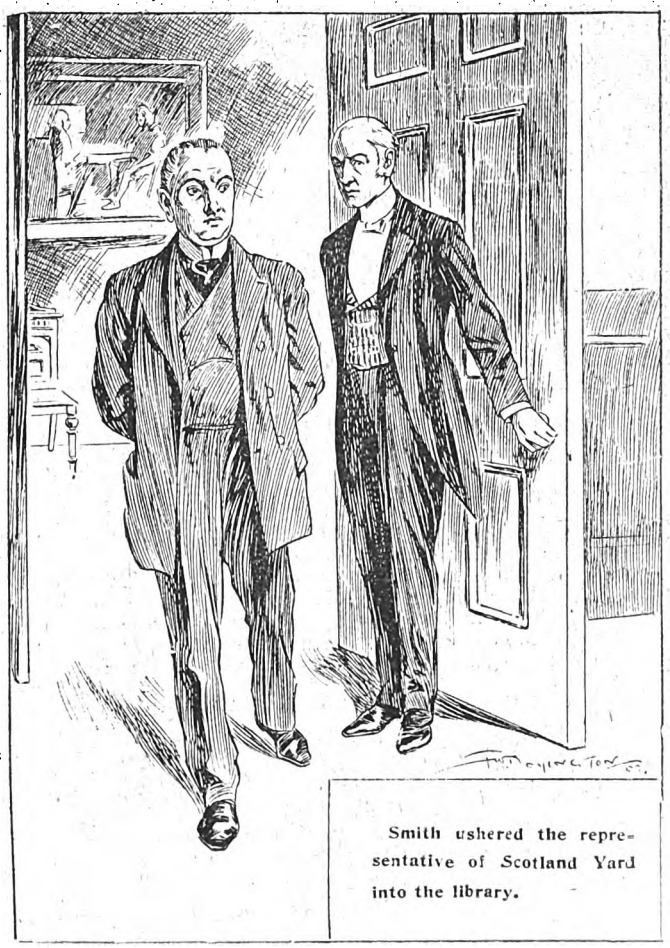
"Not a word."

"Then you did not mention Lady Delia to her?"

"No. Sir Charles has always implored me to keep his wife's name out of my inquiries until it became absolutely impossible to conceal it in view of a public prosecution. He wants to know definitely when that time comes."

"Why?"

The detective did not reply for a moment. When he spoke he leant forward and subdued his voice. "I am as



Smith ushered the representative of Scotland Yard into the library.

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Mr. Winter produced a copy of the "Police Gazette."

sure as I am sitting here, sir, that Sir Charles will not live if any disgrace should come to be attached to his wife's memory."

"Do you mean that he will kill himself?"

"I do. He has changed a great deal since this affair happened. He is not the same man. He appears to be always mooning about her. And people say that they were not so devoted to one another when she was alive."

Again did the barrister switch off their talk from an unpleasant topic.

"This description of Pyne is not much use," he said. "It applies to every athletic young Englishman of good physique and gentlemanly appearance."

"Quite true. I don't depend on that for his arrest, but it will be valuable for identification. 'Blue eyes, light brown hair, fresh clear complexion, well-modelled nose and chin.' Some of these things can be changed by tricks, but not all. For instance, there would be no use in smoking a man with black eyes and irregular features.

"'Smoking' him?"

"Oh, that's our way of putting it. Following him, it means."

"Suppose the French police don't succeed in catching him?"

"We will get him at Raleigh Mansions. He is sure to think that Lady Delia's fate has never been determined, and he will return when the inquiry has blown over, to all appearance."

"You have quite made up your mind, then, that Sydney H. Pyne is the murderer?"

"It looks uncommonly like it. At any rate, he knows something about it. If not, why did he bolt to France two days after the crime? Why has he concealed his identity? Why does he take pains to get at his correspondence in the manner he has adopted? And, by Jove! suppose he isn't in Monte Carlo at all, but in London all the time!"

Mr. Winter glowed with his sudden inspiration, but Brett drily kept him to the lower level of realities.

"Pyne is, or was, in Monte Carlo. Of that you may be sure. He, and none other, got the letters sent to the Hotel du Cercle. I cannot for the life of me imagine why he did not take the last one. But let us look at what we know. Lady Delia, we will say, went to Pyne's chambers, secretly and of her own accord. That may be taken as fairly established. Hence there is a blank in our intelligence until she appears as a hardly recognisable corpse, stuffed by hands beneath an old drainpipe in the Thames at Putney. How do you fill up that gap, Mr. Winter?"

"Simply enough. Pyne, or some other person, persuaded her to voluntarily accompany him to Putney. She was killed there, and not in London. It would be almost a matter of impossibility for any man to have conveyed her lifeless body from Raleigh Mansions to Putney without attracting some notice. One man could *not* do it. Several might, but it is madness to imagine that a number of of people would join together for the purpose of killing this poor lady."

"The seemingly impossible is often accomplished."

"Do you really believe, then, that she met her death in London?"

"I have quite an open mind on the question."

"You forget that she had clearly resolved early that day to visit her sister at Richmond, and Putney is in the direct road. What more reasonable than to assume——"

"Beware of assumptions! You are assuming all this time that Pyne was a principal in her murder."

"Very well, Mr. Brett. Then I ask you straight out if you don't agree with me?"

"I do not."

This declaration astounded the barrister himself. Often the mere utterance of one's own thoughts is a surprise. Speech seems to stiffen the wavering outlines of reflection, and the new creation may differ essentially from its embryo. It was so with Brett in this instance.

Ever since Mr. Winter's arrival had aroused him from the positive stupor caused by Mr. Dodge's unwitting revelation, Reginald Brett had been slowly but definitely deciding that Mensmore did not kill Lady Delia. He had seen him, unprepared, facing death as preferable to dishonour. At such moments a man's soul is laid bare. With the shadow of a great crime upon it Mensmore's actions

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could not have been so genuine and straightforward as they undoubtedly were.

Mensmore, of course, might in some way be bound up with the mystery surrounding Lady Delia's movements. His very utterances in Brett's room at the Hotel du Cercle implied as much. That was another matter. It would receive his (Brett's) most earnest attention. But the major hypothesis, so quickly jumped at by the police, needed much more substantiation than it had yet obtained.

That it was plausible was demonstrated by the barrister's readiness to adopt it at the outset. Even now that his impulse to fasten the crime on Mensmore weakened he wondered at his eagerness to defend him.

Mr. Winter was even more surprised.

"I don't see how you can take that view," he cried. "Pyne's behaviour is, to say the least, unaccountable. If he is an innocent man then he must be a foolish one. Besides, why should he necessarily be innocent? This is the first gleam of light we have had in a very dark business, and I mean to follow it up."

The vindictive emphasis of his tone showed that the detective was annoyed at Brett's impassive attitude. He even went so far as to dimly evolve a theory that the barrister wished to throw him off Pyne's trail on account of his sympathy for Mrs. Hillmer, but Reggie rapidly dispelled this notion.

"You are here, I suppose, to ask my advice in pursuance of our understanding that we are working together in the matter, as it were?" he said.

"Well, something of the kind, sir."

"Then I recommend that we see the inside of that closed flat in Raleigh Mansions at the earliest moment."

"Do you mean by a search warrant?"

"Certainly not. Do you want the whole neighbourhood to know of it? You have probably heard of locks being picked before to-day. You and I, and none other, must have a quiet look round the place without anyone being the wiser."

Mr. Winter hesitated, but the prospect was attractive. "I think I can manage it," he said, smiling reflectively. "Will six this evening suit?"

"Admirably."

"Then I will call for you."

After a parting glare at Smith, who returned it, nose in air, Mr. Winter ran down the stairs, murmuring, "Blest if I can understand Mr. Brett. But this is a good move. We might learn something."

CHAPTER XIV.

No. 12, Raleigh Mansions.

When the door of Pyne's or Mensmore's flat swung open before the skilful application of a skeleton key, a gust of cold air swept from out of the interior blackness, and whirled an accumulation of dust down the stairs.

It is curious how a disused house seems to bottle up, as it were, an atmospheric accumulation which always seeks to escape at the first available moment. Emptiness is more than a mere word; it has life and the power of growth. A residence closed for a week is less depressing than if it has not been inhabited for a month. If the period of neglect be lengthened into a year, the sense of dreariness is magnified immeasurably.

In this instance the mysterious abode might have been the ghostly abiding place of disembodied spirits, so cold were its aspects, so uninviting the dim vista that sprung into uncertain vision before the flickering rays of a wax vesta struck by the detective.

But neither the policeman nor his companion was a nervous subject.

They entered at once, closed the door by its latch, and, aided by other matches, found the switch of the electric light.

In this bright radiance the indefinable vanished. The flat became a cosy, fairly well-appointed bachelor's "diggings," neglected and untidy, yet not without a semblance of comfort which only needed the presence of a sturdy housemaid and a fire to be converted into the ordinary chambers with which the locality abounds.

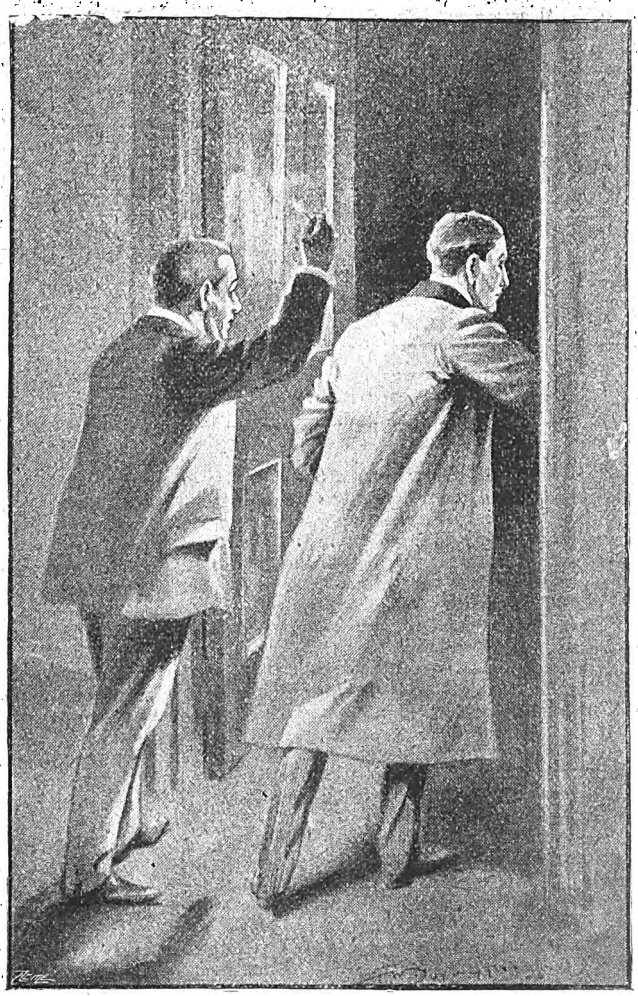
Their first care was to draw down all the blinds, the neglect of which housewifely proceeding argued the careless departure of a mere male when the place was vacated.

A rapid preliminary survey followed, and drew from Brett the remark:—

"Furnished by a woman, but occupied by a man."

Mr. Winter agreed, but he did not know why, so he put a tentative question on the point.

"Don't you see," said Brett, "that the carpets and furniture match, that the beds have vallances, that the spare bedroom for a guest is even more elaborate than that used by the tenant, that care has been taken in fitting up the kitchen, and taste displayed in the selection of pieces of



So uninviting was the dim vista that sprung into uncertain vision before the flickering rays of a wax vesta.

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"Here's a find!" shouted the detective.

bric-à-brac. Only a woman attends to these things. On the other hand, a card tray has been used as a receptacle for cigar ash, the pictures—no woman ever buys a picture—have been picked up promiscuously from shops where they sell sporting prints, and the sides of the mantelpieces are chipped by having feet propped against them. There are plenty of other signs, but these suffice."

Thenceforth the two men devoted themselves to their task, each after his kind.

The representative of Scotland Yard hunted for documents, photographs, torn envelopes; he looked in the covers of books to see if they were inscribed; he opened every drawer; ransacked every corner, peered into the interior of jars, pots, and ovens; appraised the value of the furniture, noted its age, and was specially zealous in studying the appearance of the only bedroom which had been occupied so far as he could judge.

Brett, having given a casual glance round, entered the sitting-room, selected the most comfortable chair, and proceeded to envelop himself in clouds of smoke.

He had not spent two minutes in Mensmore's flat before he made a striking discovery.

The dwelling consisted of a central passage, dividing two equal portions from each other. That on the right contained a drawing-room and a large bedroom, with dressing-room attached. On the left were another bedroom, a dining-room, a kitchen, and store-room. At the end of the passage, which terminated in the transverse corridor, were the bath-room, a pantry, and a small room, empty now, but apparently designed for a servant's bedroom.

The furniture, as has been stated, was good in quality and sufficient for its purposes. But the fact which immediately impressed Brett was that the arrangement of the sitting-room differed essentially from the other details of the flat.

The same care had not been taken in the disposition of the articles. They had been dumped down anyhow, without taste or regard for suitable position. The carpet had not been bought for this special apartment like the carpets elsewhere. A handsome ebony cabinet stood in the wrong place. The blue china ornaments obviously intended to fill its shelves were littered about the mantelpiece or on small tables, whilst the Satsuma ware meant for the overmantel was stiffly disposed on the cabinet.

Small matters these, but Brett thought them more fruitful of accurate theory than the detective's hunt for a written history of the crime!

So as he smoked, he mused, and examined.

"The drawing-room was left to the last before being furnished," he thought. "The usual course. It was left for some time probably. The rest of the flat was arranged by a woman—Mrs. Hilmer in all likelihood—before the arrival of her brother. Then he came and tackled the vacant room. The history of the place is as plain to me as though I were present. More than that, a woman—Mrs. Hilmer again, let us say—fixed upon these latter purchases, but without measurements. She did not personally see to their adaptability, and she certainly did not supervise their final arrangement. Now, why was that? Again, these things are more worn than those in the other rooms. Were they bought second-hand? If so, why? A woman thinks most of her drawing-room. It is the last place in which she would economise."

Mr. Winter entered, anxious and puzzled.

"Found anything?" said Brett, without looking at him.

"Not a rag, not a piece of old newspaper with a date on it. A lot of papers were burnt in the kitchen grate, but from the remnants I judge that they were mostly bills."

"The place has been systematically cleared, eh?"

"It looks like it."

"Going to hunt here?"

"Yes. You don't seem to take much interest in the premises, Mr. Brett, though you persuaded me to do a bit of housebreaking in order to get here."

"I find the quietude good for thought, Mr. Winter. Be good enough not to make more noise than is absolutely necessary."

The other sniffed. He was disappointed. He hoped for something tangible from this visit, and the outlook was far from promising.

"This room appears to have been lived in a good deal," he growled.

"That is one way of looking at it."

"Is there any other way?" His voice snapped out the question as if he held the barrister personally responsible for his failure to gain a clue.

"No, Mr. Winter, I should have guessed your point of view exactly."

"My point of view, indeed! Do you want me to draw up another chair and light a pipe? Should we be enlightened by tobacco smoke?"

"I cannot trust your tobacco. Try a cigar."

The detective angrily thumped a Chesterfield lounge to see if it betrayed aught suspicious.

At that instant Reggie's glance rested on the fireplace. The grate contained the ashes of a fire, a fire not long lighted. This, combined with the undrawn blinds, argued a departure early in the morning.

"He went to Monte Carlo by the day Channel service," mused Brett. "He may have left a few hours after Lady Delia's death, as Mrs. Hilmer was not certain as to the exact date."

Somehow the few cinders attracted him. They had, perchance, witnessed a tragedy.

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Suddenly he stopped smoking. He was so startled by something he had seen that Mr. Winter must have noticed his agitation were not the detective at that instant intently screwing his eyes to peer behind the back of the elaborate cabinet.

On the hearth was a handsome Venetian fender. Into each end was loosely socketed a beautifully-moulded piece of ironwork to hold the fire-irons. That on the left was whole, but from that on the right a small spike had been broken off.

By comparison with its fellow the missing portion was identical with the bit of iron found imbedded in Lady Delia's skull. Of this damning fact Brett had no manner of doubt, though the incriminatory article itself was then locked in a drawer in his own residence.

He did not move. He sat as one transfixed.

What a weapon for such a deed. Was ever more outlandish instrument used with murderous intent? The entire bracket could easily be detached from the fender, and would, no doubt, inflict a terrible blow. But why seize this clumsy device when it actually supported a heavy brass poker?

The thing savoured of madness, of the wild vagary of a homicidal maniac. It was incomprehensible, strange beyond belief.

Yet as Brett pictured up the final scene in that tragedy, as he saw his ill-fated friend stagger helplessly to the ground before a treacherous and crushing stroke, a fierce light leapt into his face and his lips set tight with unflinching purpose.

Had Mensmore been within reach that moment he would assuredly have been lodged in a felon's cell forthwith. No excuse, no palliation could be accepted. The man who could so foully slay a gentle, kindly, high-minded lady deserved the utmost rigour of the law, no matter what the circumstances that led to the commission of the deed.

It was not often that Brett allowed impulse to so master reason.

In queer altruistic mood he asked himself why he did not spring from his chair, and, tearing the bracket from its supports, exhibit it to his fellow-worker, whilst he gave, in a few passionate sentences, the information that would set the French police to scour the Mediterranean littoral until they found the *White Heather*. Of what matter to him was the suffering of a sister or sweetheart? Did the man who killed Lady Delia reck of these things? Yes, he would do it——"

But a cry of triumph from Mr. Winter arrested the fateful words even as they trembled on his lips.

"Here's a find!" shouted the detective. "Thinking is all very well, Mr. Brett, but hard work is better. What do you make of that?"

"That" was a letter, which in the manner known to many a puzzled householder, had slipped down behind a drawer in the cabinet, to be crushed against the wardrobe at the back, and lie there forgotten and unnoticed.

Even in his perturbed state the barrister could not help glancing at the crumpled document, first noting the date, October 15th of the year just closed, with the superscription, "Mountain Butts, Wyoming." There was no envelope.

It was addressed to "Dear Bertie," and ran as follows:

"Your welcome note and its draft for fifty dollars came to hand last week. My sisters and I can never forget your generosity. We know you are hard up, and that you can ill spare these frequent gifts, or loans, as you are pleased to call them. You and I have been in many a tight place, old chap, and I never knew you to fail either with hand or heart. And when we landed into this ranch, on my advice, and nearly starved to death, it was you who were bold enough to cut yourself adrift so that you might make something to keep the pot boiling.

"But the tide is turning. You know my failing; this time I will try not to be too sanguine. There have been big gold discoveries in this country. It is now firmly believed that all our land is auriferous, and the scoundrel who sold us this beggarly ranch has tried to upset our title. Thanks to your foresight, he was knocked out at the first round. So I may soon have big news for you. By Jove, won't it be a change if we both become rich? And won't the girls have a time in Paris? However, I must not say too much this time. I have been taught caution by repeated failures. Write by return, and say if this reaches you all right.—Your faithful friend, SYDNEY H. PYNE."

"What do you think of that?" cried the detective, when Brett had slowly mastered the contents of the letter.

"Think! I am too dazed to think."

"We can now learn all about him from America."

"About whom?"

"About Pyne, of course."

"Then did Pyne come by the same mail as this letter in order to murder Lady Delia? It is dated October 15th, and she was killed on November 6th. It takes twelve days,

Brett sprang forward, fell on his knees, and intently examined the iron rest.

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at the quickest, for a letter to come here from Wyoming. And Pyne, the writer of it, not the receiver, must have travelled in the same steamer or its immediate successor."

Mr. Winter's face fell, but he stuck to his point: "Anyhow, Pyne was here about that time. I have seen the secretary to the company that owns these flats. Pyne took the room for six months from September 1st. When asked for references he gave his sister's name, and as she banks with the National—and she has always paid her rent for five years—it was good enough. Still, I must confess that Pyne could hardly be in Wyoming in October if he lived here in September and in November."

The barrister answered between his set teeth: "Yes, it is rather puzzling."

"Perhaps the letter was left there as a plant."

"An elaborate one. It must have been conceived a month before the murder."

"But suppose it never came from Wyoming. We have no proof that it was written in America."

"We have proof of nothing at present."

"Well, Mr. Brett, have you a theory? This is the place where you ought to shine, you know."

"I have no theory. I must think for hours, for days, before I see my way clear."

"Clear to what, sir?"

"To telling you how, when, and where to arrest the murderer of Lady Delia."

"So this 'find' of mine is of great importance?"

"Undoubtedly. I remember its contents sufficiently, but you will let me see it again if necessary?"

"With pleasure, sir. And that reminds me. You never returned that small bit of iron to me. You recollect I lent it to you some time since."

"Perfectly. Come with me. I will model it in wax and give it to you."

"All right, sir; but as we are here I may as well continue my search. I may drop on something else of value."

Brett resumed his seat, and did not stir until the detective had completely rummaged the cabinet. The reading of that queer epistle from Pyne to Bertie—from the real Simon Pure to the sham one—from one man to his double—had stopped him at the very threshold of disclosure.

The document impressed him as being genuine. If so, who on earth was Pyne, and why had Mensmore taken his name, if that was the solution of the tangle?

Whatever the explanation, he would not jump to a conclusion. The web had closed too securely round Mensmore to allow of escape. Hence, Brett could bide his time. Another week might solve many elements in the case now indistinct and nebulous. He would wait.

Winter finally satisfied himself there was nothing else in the cabinet. He approached the fireplace, peered into every vase on the overmantel, picked with his penknife at the back of the frame to feel for other letters, and in doing so several times kicked the fender.

The barrister vaguely wondered whether the man of method would note the missing portion of the iron "dog."

"Surely," he thought, "he will see it now," as Mr. Winter bent to examine the ashes, and actually took the poker from off the very support itself in order to rake among the cinders.

The other even scrutinised the fire-irons, but the too obvious fact that, so to speak, stared him in the face, escaped notice. He was quite wrapped up in his theory that Lady Delia had been killed at Putney, and not in Sloane Square.

At last he quitted the room, and walked off to the small apartments at the end of the main corridor.

Instantly Brett sprang forward, fell on his knees, and intently examined the iron rest with a strong lens. It bore no visible signs at the locality of the break. Taking some wax from his pocket, Reggie took a slight impression of the fracture.

When Mr. Winter returned he found the barrister sitting in his chair, still smoking, and with set face and fixed eyes.

Soon afterwards they left the flat, carefully leaving all things as they found them. They said little on their way to Victoria Street, for Brett was trying to explain Mensmore's attitude at Monte Carlo, and the detective was considering the best use to which he could put that all-important letter.

Besides, Mr. Winter attributed his companion's silence to annoyance. Had not he, Winter, laid hands on the only direct piece of evidence yet discovered as to Pyne's identity, and this in defiance of Brett's spoken philosophy? He could afford to be generous and not to worry his amateur colleague with questions.

Thus they reached the barrister's chambers. Brett asked the other to sit down for a moment whilst he obtained a model of the small lump of iron. He took it into his bedroom, fitted it into the wax impression obtained at Raleigh Mansions, and noted that the two coincided perfectly.

Then he crushed the wax into shapelessness again.

He handed the bit of iron to Winter without comment.

The latter said: "It had better remain in my keeping now, sir, but if you want to see it again, of course I will be very glad——"

"I shall never want it again," said Brett, and his voice was harsh and cold, for he had seldom experienced such a strain as the last hour had given him. "It is an accursed thing. It has caused one death already, and may cause others."

"I sincerely hope it will cause a man to be hanged," cried the detective, "for this affair is the warmest I have ever tackled. However, I'll get him as sure as his name's Pyne, if he has forty aliases and as many addresses."

Smith let Mr. Winter out. The latter, halting for a moment at the door, said quietly, "Is your name Pyne?"

"No, it ain't, any more than yours is Summer. See?"

Each man thought he had had his joke, so they were better friends thenceforth, but Mr. Winter was thoughtful as he passed into the street.

"This is a funny business," he communed. "There isn't enough evidence against Pyne to hang a cat, yet I *think* he's the man. And Brett's a queer chap. Was he cut up about me finding the letter, or has he got some notion in his head. He's as close as an oyster. I wonder if he *did* dine at Hampstead on the evening of the murder, as he said at the inquest? I must inquire into it."

(To be continued.)

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We devote, every week, two pages of *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "Guilty Gold," by Headon Hill, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case the source *must* be stated. The prize of One Guinea offered for the best Storyette in this competition has been won this week by Mr. J. Cunningham, 23 Havelock Street, Lower Broughton, Manchester. Attempts this week may deal with Stories about ANY SUBJECT, and must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, January 28th. Post-cards only, please.

Consolation.

LATE one evening, as a messenger from a local paper was going home, he heard a person who was struggling in a river close by calling for help.

He shouted:

"Hello there! Are you drowning?"

"I am. Save me, I'm lost," frantically exclaimed the drowning man.

"What a pity," said the messenger consolingly, "you are too late for the last edition to-night, but cheer up, you'll have a whole column to yourself to-morrow morning."

J. C.

Wanted a Cave For Two.

WHEN news came the other day of the French plan to invade England, an Irish militiaman stationed at Halifax was heard to remark that if ever an enemy landed in this country he would certainly bolt, taking a good stock of provisions, and hide away in a cave he knew of.

When the colonel heard of it he called the man out of the ranks on parade, and lectured him severely on his cowardice.

"You're a disgrace to the regiment!" he said. "Fancy a man of the 26th West Riding threatening to run away! But I'd be after you in quick time, my man, never fear."

"Sure, an' you'd be welcome, colonel. But don't forget to bring yer own praties an' things, sor."

J. R. T.

"There's a Language that's Mute."

A GENTLEMAN one Sunday morning was led to watch a young country girl on the high road from the village to the church by observing that she looked hither and thither, this way and that, upon the road, as if she had lost something.

The bells were ceasing to ring, and there was no one visible on the road, except the girl and the gentleman, who recognised in her the errand-maid of a neighbouring farmer.

"What are you looking for, my girl?" asked he as the damsel continued to examine the road.

She answered gravely:

"Sir, I'm looking to see if my master be gone to church."

Now, her master had a wooden leg.

J. I.

He Wasn't Even Murmuring.

A BOER general on his way to camp, hearing groans, proceeded to the spot whence they came, and found a Boer soldier nursing a wounded arm, groaning loudly every now and then.

"For shame!" said the general, "making all that fuss about a scratched arm? Why, there's a man over yonder with his head off and he's not murmuring!"

W. P.

Why He Wanted to Leave.

THE man who did odd jobs in a certain school gave up his place the other day.

When asked what was his reason, he said:

"I'm honest, and I won't stand being suspected. If I find a handkerchief or pencil about the school when I'm sweeping, I give it up.

"Every now and again, however, the teacher, or someone who is too cowardly to face me, will put a slur upon me. Why, a little while ago I saw wrote on the blackboard, 'Find the least common multiple.' Well, I looked from cellar to garret for that multiple, and I wouldn't know the thing if I met it.

"Last night, in big writing on the board, it said, 'Find the greatest common measure.' 'Well,' I said, 'both o' them things are lost now, an' I'll be accused of stealing 'em,' so I chucked the job."

E. C.

Mistook the Verdict.

FOR a grave breach of the football laws, a crack player was brought before the authorities, and put on trial in a room overlooking a busy street. So great indeed was the clatter of the traffic, that many remarks made by those judging his case were quite inaudible to the footballer.

"We have now considered both yours and the referee's version of the affair, my man," mumbled the chairman at last, "and have no hesitation in suspending you till the end of the season. It is entirely your own fault that we have been obliged to cut your wings close for the winter. You can go."

Outside, a friend sympathised with the footballer.

"What's the trouble?" asked the player. "I'm not suspended."

"Yes, you are—till the end of the season. Didn't you hear the chairman say they'd cut your wings close for the winter?"

"No," stammered the player, aghast. "I thought he said, 'oblige me by closing the window, and then you can go!'"

R. A. H. G.

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Not from Arcadia.

DURING the visit of a travelling pantomime company to Dumfries a very ludicrous *contretemps* occurred, which, nevertheless, "brought down the house."

Owing to the illness of one of the juvenile members of the company, a local substitute had to be obtained for the purpose of figuring in one of the sylvan scenes.

On being accosted in stage parlance by the hero of the piece with "Sweet child, when camest thou from Arcadia? Tell me! Tell me, prithee!" the youngster cried out shrilly:

"Please, sir, Ah'm no frae 'Cadia'; Ah'm frae Dalbeattie, and Ah've been promised tuppence an' an orange to sit quiet an' haud my tongue."

J. C.

New-fashioned Beef Tea.

I WAS stricken down with fever while serving in Bermuda, and after a critical week or ten days, luckily turned the corner and made slow but steady progress on the road towards recovery.

The doctor ordered me beef tea, made fresh daily, and in obedience to his command the negro cook brought me the nourishing liquid every morning.

One day he brought it in while the doctor was in the room and handed me the cup. I was hungry, and swallowed a mouthful eagerly, but the taste disgusted me, and I spluttered and choked.

The doctor's sharp eye detected something wrong, and he said:

"Hello, sergeant, what's the matter?"

I pointed to the liquid in the cup in eloquent silence.

He took it, smelt it, tasted it, and cried indignantly to the cook:

"What in the name of conscience is this, Sambo? This is not beef tea."

"Oh, yes, sah, dat beef tea, sah," replied the cook. "I not have time fetch de beef from store dis mawnin', so make um sergeant's beef tea out of cow's head!"

W. A.

The Bag Had a Hole In It.

MR. BOWSER, in the midst of a heated argument the other evening, fell over the cat and hurt his nose.

"That's enough!" he shouted. "I'll kill the brute—I've long threatened to," and catching the unfortunate feline as it was about to dive into the coal cellar, he managed, at the expense of a badly scratched hand, to ram it into an old Gladstone-bag, along with a couple of bricks, and he set off then and there in the direction of the canal.

Arriving at the dark towing-path, he felt his way to the edge of the water, then, with a mighty swing, he launched his burden into the middle of the stream. Such power did he put into his arm that he overbalanced himself and fell in himself with a mighty splash, and narrowly escaped a watery grave.

Some hour or so later, Mr. Bowser arrived home dripping wet, cold, and cross, but triumphant, to find the cat waiting on the mat for him.

"Oh, jumping Jerusalem!" he yelled, "why I've drowned the brute."

"I don't think so, my dear," replied Mrs. Bowser sweetly, "if you recollect that old Gladstone-bag had a large hole in it, and——" but Bowser had vanished upstairs.

H. E. L.

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Man-Afraid-of-the Sun's Bear.

SEVERAL years ago, when No Man s Land was overrun with roving bands of Indians and cattlemen, who fought each other with equal vigour and cheerfulness, I was sent to locate a ranch site in Texas near the north boundary of the Pan-handle, for a Mexican cattle company.

At Santa Fé I looked up an old ex-boss of my father's ranch, a Mexican and Indian half-breed, who, if he could be induced to keep from loving to an exaggerated extent his potent enemy, *mescal*, was the best all-round cow-hand I ever saw; probably an inheritance from his father, who had been an old time California cattle-driver.

In a wretched little saloon in the Mexican quarter I found José sitting at a bullet-scarred table and fondly caressing a glass of his old enemy. His eyes were a bit watery, and as I entered he was saying to the bar-keeper:

"Yes, Miguel, they staked my poor *padre* alive over a red ants' nest, and who knows what tortures he endured?" —with an expressive shrug and shiver—"We found his bones years after, and I swore everlasting vengeance on every Apache."

José always told his story when the *mescal* was getting in its fine work; later he would be looking for six-shooter victims.

"Oh yes, Beltran," he cried, catching sight of me. "Hail friend, how glad I am to see thee; thou art no longer a coward and afraid of big José, eh? How is thy father, thy lady mother, and everything at Las Cruces?"

After answering the many questions, I managed to get José outside the saloon and explain my errand, asking him to let *mescal* alone and be my guide to Texas.

"Si! si!" of course he would for the sake of his dear old *patron*, Don Luis, and his son as well. Besides his mother was of the Arapahoe tribe; we could go to No Man's Land or the reservation and see her, too.

In the course of two or three days José and I bought a couple of stout ponies, and as we had our own saddle accoutrements, some bacon, flour, coffee, sugar and meat, coffee-pot and skillet were the only things needed.

So one bright clear morning in September, we saddled our ponies, tied on our blankets and provisions, and rode out from the famous old town, taking the direction of the historical Santa Fé trail, which we were to follow as far as Round Mound, then striking eastward to the Pan-Handle.

The weather was perfect and the horses in fine condition. In the course of several uneventful days we rode up to the circle L. S. ranch and put up for the night.

Making the ranch our general headquarters, we took trips into the surrounding country and in a couple of weeks managed to find about what was wanted—good pasturage, water, timber and a fine location for the home ranch and main corra's. After writing up my report I was ready to accede to José's desire of visiting his Indian relations.

From one of the circle L. S. punchers we learnt that a band of Arapahoes was encamped near Beaver Creek, and accordingly we set our faces in that direction. Early one morning three days later we rode over a ridge and there before us, in a little hollow, nestled the Indian village. From the smoke holes in the tepees thin columns of smoke lazily curled heavenwards and, here and there, *travois* ponies came in loaded down with fire-wood.

Only a few Indians were moving about, and a few saddled ponies stood before the owners' tepees. The village seemed unusually quiet, but when we were finally spied by a couple of wolfish-looking dogs, they raised such a row that in a moment we were surrounded by innumerable dogs, whooping children and questioning squaws.

On asking for his mother José learnt that she had died the spring previous and that she had intrusted to Grey Wolf a gold and silver bracelet for him. It was one that his father had given her for a wedding present, and originally came from Spain.

Pressing our ponies through the crowd we came to Grey Wolf's tepee, dismounted and crawled within.

Grey Wolf's squaw was pounding some dried meat, but when we entered she brought us water from a stone jar without, and José and I washed our faces and hands of the dust that had accumulated during our journey. Meanwhile our saddles were brought in and the ponies led to graze.

After our ablutions the squaw brought out a plug of tobacco, a cutting board, and a stone pipe, which, according to Indian etiquette, we smoked alternately.

It seemed strange to see the squaw doing the honours of host, but we finally learnt that most of the men and young bucks had gone on a hunting and horse-stealing expedition and would not return for a week or more.

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The squaw cooked some meat, which, with our provisions, made a very acceptable meal.

During our after-dinner smoke José informed me that he would have to put in his time during our stay in mourning for his mother, and forthwith went to his uncle Eagle Feather's tepee and seemed quite inconsolable.

In order to pass time, I struck up the acquaintance of some boys and spent the afternoon watching them run races, shoot their bows and arrows, and swim in a creek near by.

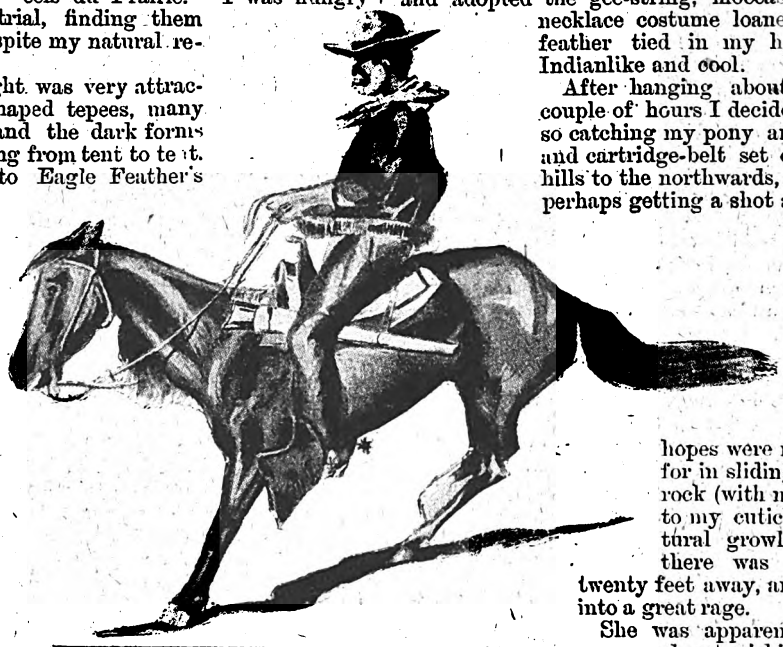
For supper we had fried rattle-snake on our menu, or, as José called them, "eels du Prairie." I was hungry and gave them a trial, finding them really very good despite my natural repugnance.

The village at night was very attractive, with its cone-shaped tepees, many bright little fires and the dark forms of the Indians gliding from tent to tent.

I strolled over to Eagle Feather's tepee and found José droning a plaintive little mourning song. Eagle Feather greeted me hospitably, and finally when I got to the subject of bear he told me through José, that he had killed a cub of the medicine bear a week previous.

"Ask him what he means by medicine bear?" I said to José.

The old man loaded his long red stone pipe, lighted it with a glowing coal that his squaw handed to him in her bare hand, took a puff or two, and began.



We slid down into the dry creek bed.

Finally after ten minutes of guttural mumblings he stopped, and José interpreted.

"He says that many years ago an Arapahoe brave took refuge from a band of pursuing Comanches in a bear's cave. The she-bear was there, but made no effort to molest him, and he, in his thanks to the Great Spirit, asked that the bear might be saved from the hunter's bullet, and in answer to his prayer, the Great Spirit painted a white turtle on the bear's throat."

Eagle Feather passed the pipe to me and took up the story again, to which I listened attentively, but could not make out a word.

He stoped at last and José translated again.

"He says that a couple of miles from camp in a rock cave there lives a big she-bear with a white spot on its throat, and as a turtle is the totem of this clan the beast is called the medicine bear and is sacred. The Indians kill her cubs but never molest the old one. She kills their dogs and colts, yet for fear of incurring bad luck they tolerate it."

As Eagle Feather looked a bit droopy and his head nodded I concluded not to keep him up, so took my departure.

On our way to Grey Wolf's tepee José said that the mourning was beginning to pall on him already, but it would show disrespect to break off too soon.

Arriving at our tepee we crawled under our blankets, and in spite of the barking of dogs and coyotes, the snoring of the squaw and her children, to say nothing of the mosquitoes, we slept.

At sunrise we were out and ready for our breakfast, which was almost purely Indian, as José had too generously distributed the bacon and sugar among his relatives.

The day promised to be unusually hot, and at the suggestion of my boy friends I got out of my clothes and adopted the gee-string, moccasins, and deer toe necklace costume loaned me, and with a feather tied in my hair, I felt quite Indianlike and cool.

After hanging about the camp for a couple of hours I decided to take a ride, so catching my pony and taking my rifle and cartridge-belt set out to explore the hills to the northwards, in hope of seeing, perhaps getting a shot at, an antelope.

I had ridden an hour or more when I came to a group of rocky hills, and, dismounting, began to poke around, hoping I would run across the medicine bear or a cub. My hopes were more than realised, for in sliding down a slanting rock (with no small detriment to my cuticle) I heard a guttural growl to one side, and there was her ladyship, not twenty feet away, and working herself into a great rage.

She was apparently as big as my pony, and not wishing to either submit to an embrace or start a shooting match and incur complications with the Indians, I fled, and to my dismay found that the bear was hustling after me. When my pony saw this queer apparition coming breakneck down the hill he jumped against the light tie-rope, snapping it of course, and galloped off across the prairie, turning his head from side to side, evidently to gauge his gait to the bear's and my own.

A tall, slim tree at the bottom of the hill invited me to ascend, and hugging my rifle under my chin I scrambled up out of reach of the big claws fanning the air beneath me. The bear sniffed around the tree and finally sat down on its haunches and combed its side. Truly this seemed ludicrous; a man treed with a good gun and a belt full of cartridges; but Indians' superstitions will not stand trifling with.

In wriggling to get a better hold, my rifle slipped to the ground and the bear left off scratching to chew the sights off the gun. I was getting thirsty and the sun was cruelly hot. I yelled until I was hoarse and then settled down to broil in silence. A couple of times when I started to descend the bear would leisurely lumber over to greet me and I climbed a trifle higher instead.

About four o'clock or so I was almost crazy from the terrible sun burning, and my body was very sore. My

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tongue was as dry as a stone, and my limbs were so numb that I could scarcely keep my hold.

When it seemed as if I could hang on no longer and was really deliberating on coming down to take the chances, the bear came over to my tree, sniffed a bit, and then, as if she were tired of the vigil, turned and slowly walked up the hill, stopping at the top of the hill to take a last look, and then disappeared.

I fairly dropped from my perch. Ah! it seemed so good to stretch my numbed arms and legs. Picking up my slightly chewed gun I started for the camp.

About dusk I found my pony in a dry creek bed, pawing for water, and by careful manœuvring caught the short trail rope and was galloping to camp.

José looked a bit worried when I dismounted in front of the tepee, but when he heard my story he laughed until the tears streamed down his cheeks.

My sun-burning was no joke, however, for my body was covered with blisters, as I had not taken the precaution to rub myself well with grease on starting out. I did so now, though, and after dusting what little flour there was left over it, I felt a bit easier, my stomach having been attended to meanwhile.

The next day I was so swollen that my eyes were almost shut, and one glance at the bright sunshine drove me back to the darkest side of the tepee.

"Ugh!" grunted Grey Wolf's squaw, "white men afraid of sun, stay in dark, see heap, one, two tree day."

I felt as if I needed at least a month.

In the course of the day, Eagle Feather came over to see me, but as neither could understand the other, we smoked in silence, thoroughly appreciating the situation.

The fourth day after my adventure I came out dressed again as civilisation intended I should be, and was hailed on all sides as "Man-afraid-of-the-sun."

This was adding insult to injury, and I swore revenge on that bear.

That night José and I talked over the advisability of shooting the beast, and finally concluded that it would be all right if we could sweeten up the medicine man with a few dollars, and a sun-glass that I had, and then leave him to appease the wrath of his people.

Accordingly the next morning José presented the old fellow with a handful of silver dollars, the coveted sun-glass and a plug of tobacco for good measure, meanwhile explaining the sacrilege we wished to commit.

The medicine man thought deeply for a few moments to give the matter due consideration, but I could foretell what it would be by the way he eyed our offerings, and when he picked them up and walked away the bear's doom was sealed, *i.e.*, if we could kill her. José had an after-mourning feast to give his relatives, and, as it would not interest me, I tinkered my gun into serviceability. About two o' clock I started out, leaving José to follow when his entertainment was over.

I rode, slowly, the pony carefully picking his way, as he had lost a shoe and was tenderfoot. We slid down into the dry creek bed and clambered up the opposite side, every moment expecting José to catch up. Finally I perceived a bobbing speck in the distance and pulled up to wait, but instead of José it proved to be Little Elk, the medicine man's son.

"Where's José?" I asked when he came up.

"Ugh, José, he say he stay eat, send me same him."

This certainly seemed queer, for José rarely changed his mind.

"Well, I suppose it's all right," although I had many doubts, as I heard that this Little Elk was somewhat of a "lar" as well as dandy and drone. His painted face and

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immaculate clothes seemed proof of part of the tale. He was very chatty and wanted to know what my plans were, was I afraid, and a dozen other questions.

On reaching the hills I dismounted, and, after examining my gun and revolver, climbed the very hill I had retreated down so precipitately a few days before. I had asked my companion to come along, but he still bestrode his pony and seemed satisfied where he was. I reviled him sweetly, but it had no effect, he wouldn't move. Prowling around till almost sun down, I stumbled fairly on Mrs. Bear. She was very much at home and shuffled forward to greet me. I retreated, hoping to get her down hill, where, if there was any trouble, Little Elk could help me out.

My trot broke into a run, and after much slipping and sliding I reached the bottom of the hill to find that the brave (?) had fled, leaving me to conduct matters alone.

I cocked my rifle and waited for a good chance to present itself. The bear in crossing a slippery rock, lost

Jose crept out for the bear's hide.

her foothold and stumbled, giving me time to get in a good rib shot, which I followed up with a couple more, trying for the shoulder. The bear reared straight up and bit at the wounds.

The white mark at her throat showed for an instant, and my foresight bore on it like to a bull's eye, and with the crack of the rifle the bear trembled and then fell limp, rolling down hill almost to my feet.

A loud "Huy! Huy!" back of me, announced that my noble associate had returned. He came galloping up, hair and feathers flying, waving his gun, and spying the dead bear, and before I could remonstrate, poured in a couple of shots. A squint over my gun stopped that performance, but he was still much excited.

I finally managed to calm him down enough to have his assistance in skinning the bear, but by this time it had grown quite dark. My pony, smelling the blood, refused to carry the skin, so we loaded it on to Little Elk's, and after piling rocks over the carcase to keep out coyotes started for the village.

When the lights appeared I spurred on ahead to tell José the good news, and on arriving there I found him much excited and worried. He wanted to know where I had been, and so forth.

Finally I found that Little Elk had told him that I had decided to wait until the next day, as I was still too sore to move about much.

When he came to Grey Wolf's tepee and found that I had been gone all the afternoon he was mad all through, which did not go down any sooner when I told him I had killed the bear, and he swore vengeance on Little Elk.

"Where's that Indian?" he asked.

"Gone to his tepee, I presume. You go over and see him and get someone to bring the skin here while I get a bite to eat."

My supper over, and Grey Wolf's big pipe before me, I waited for José.

Presently he appeared, looking madder than ever.

"What's up?" I asked.

"It's all up," he replied, then added, "Listen to this: When I got to Little Elk's tepee all his relations were standing about looking at the bear skin and the old man was doing a song and dance about it. He invited them all inside and the Little Elk told them how he dreamt last night that the Great Spirit came and told him the medicine bear was an impostor and as he had never proved himself to be a brave, he must kill the beast and prove his bravery. Then he described how the white man who had gone with him fired several shots, and then he walked up close to the bear and killed it with one shot. What do you think of that?"

Now I was mad, and told my story, which José believed; but it did not get us the skin, and at my suggestion to go over and take it, José said that it would only make trouble, but that we could wait until midnight and then could steal it and "dig out."

Shortly after midnight Grey Wolf's squaw stole out to where our ponies were, saddled them up and put some dried meat in the saddle pockets.

José crept out and returned shortly, nearly bent double with the heavy bear hide. He had cut a split in Little Elk's tepee and dragged the bear skin almost from under them. We loaded it on José's big bay, and after giving the squaw some silver dollars, struck for the circle L.S.

We rode all night and at daylight camped in a dry creek bed.

I was almost dead for sleep, so took some forty winks or so while José kept guard. Late in the afternoon we struck camp and took up the trail again.

Passing some low hills we saw what looked like an Indian against the sky line.

José took a chance shot at it, and the thing disappeared. In all probability it was Little Elk looking over the ridge, hoping for a chance to steal the bear skin again.

We rode all night and camped at daylight as before, and in three days we reached the ranch, where I gave the hide to an old hunter to tan for me.

The punchers thought it a rare joke—stealing what belonged to us.

We never saw the Indians again, José remarking that he did not care for his mother's side of the house, anyhow.

When the hide was tanned we set out for Santa Fé, where I parted with José, and taking my precious bear skin with me, left for home.

B. C. BROOME.

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PEOPLE WHO ARE DEAF.

DEAFNESS, as we know, is nearly always the result of a disease of the ear. Defects of hearing may vary from a very slight decrease of the hearing powers to total deafness. With a good many people the hearing is far from being normal, although they may be unaware of this fact, and it is only when the defect increases that they begin to notice it. The majority of those who are deaf have both ears affected; when, as is often the case, deafness is more pronounced on one side than on the other, they usually believe that the hearing of only one ear, the worse, is impaired. It is always very difficult to know, when questioning a patient, for how long the infirmity has been present. Very often he will answer that he has only been deaf for the last ten or twelve months—that is to say, since the hardness of hearing became more marked; but further inquiries will generally elicit the fact that the ear trouble began years before.

As a rule, a deaf man does not like to acknowledge his infirmity, and he will take great pains to conceal it. By concentrating all his attention, he may be able to gather the sense of the speaker's words; or, if he has had a good deal of practice, he may succeed in reading, so to speak, the words on the lips of the person who is addressing him. This explains the peculiarity sometimes mentioned by deaf people who are surprised that they should be better able to understand during the day than at night, and who also want to know why they cannot understand, so well, people with a beard or a heavy moustache.

Only those who have lost, even partially, the sense of hearing know what amount of discomfort that sad infirmity entails. Social intercourse becomes an impossibility; people don't like conversing when they have to shout at the top of their voice to make themselves understood.

Some twenty or thirty years ago, to be deaf meant to be incurable. Medical men, as a rule, were little acquainted with ear diseases, and held it was better not to meddle with an organ of which so little was known. The method of non-interference was, as it were, the only treatment recognised, not only in ordinary cases of deafness, but also when there existed a discharge from the ears. When it is remembered that purulent diseases of the ear are the most frequent causes of cerebral abscess, and often give rise to decay of the ossicles, facial paralysis, meningitis, and even embolism, it may be wondered how many lives have thus been lost by lack of proper treatment. The popular prejudice still existing, that a discharge must not be interfered with, must be uprooted at any cost, as also the belief that deafness cannot be cured. Ear diseases are nowadays no more incurable than any other organic affection.

To realise this fact, all who are interested in the matter should read the January issue of the "Journal for the Deaf," which contains most useful information on the curative treatment of deafness. The publication is issued by the Drouet Institute, and is forwarded under cover, free of charge, to any person who applies for it to the secretary, 72 Regent's Park Road, London, N.W. This medical establishment, since it was first opened twelve years ago in Paris by the late Dr. Drouet, then in Brussels, and lastly, in 1896, in London, has effected the cure of several thousands of deaf people. In contradistinction with all others, the Drouet method of treatment is based on the sole employment of medicines; no instruments or apparatus whatever are used. The principal of these medicines is a crescent-shaped plaster, which is applied every night, and during the night only, behind the ears.

The preparation does not "draw," but, on the contrary, acts by gradual absorption, and in this way reaches the diseased parts, which could not possibly be touched otherwise, and this is the whole secret of the success of the treatment. This also explains how people who had previously followed many treatments without avail have ultimately been able to recover their hearing. The "Journal for the Deaf" records several such cases, and altogether gives an account of nearly two hundred recent cures.

It may be interesting to mention here a few of these cures, to better illustrate the remarkable curative powers of the method.

Miss Gertie F., a shop-assistant, of Victoria Street, Wolverhampton, had been affected for the last four years with chronic deafness, at first in the right ear and then in the left. The right ear was the worst; the tick of a watch could only be heard at a distance of two inches, and the lady experienced distressing buzzing noises. Miss G. F. had already followed three different treatments before applying to the Drouet Institute, but to no purpose.

"In each treatment," she stated when submitting her case, "I have been given a medicine for the throat, and at the hospital a white powder to inhale."

Deafness, however, could not possibly yield to such methods, the seat of the disease being the internal ear; but the Drouet treatment was rapidly successful, a cure being obtained in eight weeks.

Extracts are given hereafter of a letter written by the lady a short time ago:

"Victoria Street, Wolverhampton,
"November 7th, 1900.

"I am writing to thank you for the treatment I have had from your Institute. I feel I am all right, and the noises in my ear have quite gone, so I really think there is no need for me to have any more. I shall certainly recommend your valuable Institute to anybody I know who are deaf. "MISS GERTIE F."

(The full name and address will be given to any applicant.)

Miss Annie M., a matron, of Berkhamsted, Herts,

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had for the last eight years gradually grown deaf, on account of a disease of the nose and throat. Influenza had aggravated the condition, leaving the patient, as is often the case, with a running of the ears; buzzing noises and pains in the ears were also experienced.

The disease assuming such a complicated turn, Miss A. M. saw a physician, who prescribed painting with glycerine and tannin, and gave a gargle; but no relief being obtained, and the lady hearing of the remarkable results given by the Drouet treatment, decided to have a trial.

The case was submitted to the Drouet Institute towards the end of August, and less than a month afterwards a complete cure was reported, as may be seen from the following letter:

"Berkhamsted, Herts, September 24th, 1900.

"I have used the antiseptic treatment, which has entirely stopped the discharge. I can hear all right now.—Yours faithfully, MISS A. M."

(The full address will be gladly given by the Drouet Institute.)

A reverend gentleman, Mr. A. W. A., suffering from the same complaint, after only a fortnight's treatment could write:

"September 24th, 1900.

"I am glad to say your treatment has been very successful, and I can hear quite well now. I do not wish my name put in the paper, as I know how much inconvenience and annoyance it causes; but I am much obliged for your advice, and shall be glad to recommend your treatment whenever I can.

"A. W. A."

(The letter is on view at the Drouet Institute.)

James E. Owen, twenty-eight, a turner, of 13 Carbrook Street, Attercliffe Common, Sheffield. Deafness of twenty-four years' standing, following scarlet-fever, very pronounced on the left side. Intermittent noises in the head, and also offensive discharge from the ears. Cold aggravates the affection.

Treatment was prescribed, and three weeks later Mr. J. Owen reported his cure, which he confirmed in the following letter:

"I am distributing your papers to those that I know are suffering from deafness, with the hope that they will place themselves under your treatment, as it has done me good. I have not had a relapse since, so I think I am about cured altogether.—Yours, etc.,

"E. OWEN."

Mr. James Shaw, fifty-six, a bank-messenger, of 59, Meadow Street, Moss Side, Manchester. Deafness was sudden, affecting first the left ear then the right ear. The patient could only hear the ticking of a watch when held quite close to the ear. Noises were experienced, and an offensive discharge was running from the left ear.

Treatment was prescribed, and sixteen days afterwards the patient reported a complete recovery:

"I am glad to state that my hearing is now as well as it has been for some years past. I was afraid I should suffer permanently, but under your treatment, for which I am deeply grateful, my hearing is now very distinct.

"You have perfect liberty to use this as seems best.—Believe me, &c., J. SHAW."

Mr. T. Elliott, of Consett, had suffered for the last five years from a very grave ear disease. Deafness was almost complete, and attended by a distressing discharge of the left ear. Noises in the head were also experienced. Mr. Elliott saw a short time ago an account of the Drouet treatment in the paper, and decided to have a trial. By means of the pathological report form, which is sent by the Drouet Institute to patients unable to leave home, he was enabled to submit his case very clearly for examination, and commenced treatment towards the beginning of September last. On the 22nd of the same month—that is to say, in less than three weeks—a complete cure was reported, and this was confirmed in the following letter:

22, Alexandra Street, Consett,
17th November, 1900.

"I am proud to say that my hearing continues to keep splendid, also that the discharge has entirely stopped. My opinion, which I have told many that have asked me about my hearing, is that yours is the most marvellous cure of the age. I am doing my best to make it known to those who are troubled with what is mentioned in your journal.

"T. ELLIOTT."

Neglected or badly-treated nose and throat affections are liable to extend to the ear, and to cause deafness of a more or less grave character. In fact, practically all auricular affections known as catarrh of the mid-ear are the consequence of a disease of the nose and throat, and it is, therefore, of the greatest importance that these diseases should be treated from the start to prevent any possible complication. The Drouet Institute, as a matter of course, treats nose and throat affections, and that it is no less successful in dealing with them may be seen from the numerous reports given in the "Journal for the Deaf."

Let us state again that a copy of this publication will be forwarded gratis to any applicant. All persons affected with a disease of the ear, nose, or throat, should read it; and also ask for the report form, which will allow them to submit their case to the Drouet Institute. This form is sent free of charge, and the advice given is always gratuitous. For all additional information, write to the Secretary of the Drouet Institute, 72 Regent's Park Road, London, N.W.

Personal consultations are held daily, except Sunday, from two to four p.m. In this case a fee is charged for examination. Special consultations may also be had at any time by making an appointment with the consulting physician.

The letters, of which extracts have been given in this article, are on view, amongst hundreds of others, at the Drouet Institute, where they may be inspected every day, except Sunday, from ten a.m. till five p.m.

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THAT DIAMOND RING.

THE disappearance of that diamond ring was a great puzzle at the time, and the whole affair remained a mystery to my uncle till the day of his death; but the key to the enigma was given to me some time afterwards.

My uncle was an old bachelor. He had very kindly taken charge of me when, quite a boy, I was left an orphan. He was not without his faults, and I can't say that he was particularly generous in the way he paid his servants, but to me he was certainly good, and I really loved the old chap.

I was about twenty-one and was studying for the law. I was to be a barrister, but if I had had my way I should have been a detective, for the unravelling of intricate problems connected with crime always had a fascination for me.

But my uncle laughed at the idea; if it had been possible for me to pass an examination and gain a degree that would have made me at once chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, I might have had my wish, but as it was, my uncle declined to listen to my proposals. I was willing to serve in the ranks, but that did not suit him.

"You'll do better as a barrister, my boy!" he cried, on the last occasion that the question came up for discussion.

And the tone of his voice was sufficient to indicate that he had said the last word on the subject.

My uncle was having his house done up and the electric light was being installed. It was one afternoon, while his private bedroom and dressing-room were under operation for the introduction of the new illuminant, that my uncle came home rather unexpectedly and declared that he must dress and be off to an important meeting.

His dressing-room was simply destitute of furniture, and two men were at work in his bedroom, just giving some finishing touches to it. But the old gentleman said that their presence would not matter and they might go on with their work, for he only had to change his coat and waistcoat, and put on another collar and tie—or something of that sort, I don't quite remember now. Anyhow, he proceeded with his toilet, aided by his valet, and took no notice of the men. He had his peculiarities as well as his failings had my uncle.

My uncle—by the way, his name was John Hudson—had a diamond ring to which he was much attached because it had been given to him in recognition of his services to some society or institution; I believe it was valued at £60. He took this ring off his finger and laid it on the small dressing-table which stood in his bedroom temporarily; when he looked for it, in order to put it on his finger again, it was gone.

The first intimation I had of the occurrence was the arrival of the maid to summon me from the small chamber which we called a library to my uncle's room.

"I don't know what's the matter, sir," she said, with a very scared expression on her face, "but the master is in his bedroom with the door locked, and he shouted to me to fetch you and would not open the door. And he was very cross because I didn't understand him at first—you know the door is thick, Mr. James, and the master didn't speak quite plain, he seemed upset."

Much puzzled by this information, I made my way immediately to my uncle's room, the door was unlocked to allow me to enter, and then locked again. In a few words my uncle made me acquainted with the facts.

"As soon as I missed the ring, James," he concluded, "I locked this door and the one leading to the empty dressing-room, and sent for you. That ring is gone, but it must be found before these men are permitted to go out of this room."

"What do you propose to do, uncle?" I asked, looking from one to another of the occupants of the room.

"Search them!" snorted my uncle. "They won't object—if they are honest, and a search will prove their innocence and clear away the suspicion which rests on all three at the present moment. That ring has not gone out of this room—I can swear to that—and I intend to find it."

I thought of suggesting that we should hunt about the room before we proceeded to subject the three men to the indignity of a search, but my uncle anticipated me.

"While you were coming here," he explained, "Jackson (the valet) looked round about the table to see if it had dropped on the floor, but he could not find it. Here's a chance for your detective skill, my boy!".

I thought that was rather an unkind remark, but I looked over it because I knew that the old gentleman was in a bad temper.

Still, perhaps there was a chance for me after all.

I made a quick survey of the room without moving from the spot on which I stood.

I was bound to confess that there was no earthly chance of that ring getting out of the room except by being carried out; it could not have been thrown out of the window, for that was shut and fastened. From where I stood I could see that window of the dressing-room was also shut and fastened.

There was no other possible outlet.

That ring was either in the possession of one of the occupants of the room or it was hidden away in some crevice.

The first thing to be done was to make sure that it was not concealed on the person of either of the three men—the valet and the two workmen, and then we must ransack the whole room to find the place of concealment.

As each man was searched, he would pass into the dressing-room so that there should be no possibility of the ring being handed to him by the remaining two or one, as the case might be.

Well, we began the search. The men protested, but complied. My uncle did not go in for half-measures;

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each man had to take off his waistcoat, trousers, boots and socks, and the valet would have to take off his coat in addition, he being the only one of the three who was wearing a coat. The garments were handed to me, and I searched and felt along linings, and in short thoroughly overhauled everything. I actually went so far as to make each man open his mouth and cough, in case he might be practising the old Hindoo trick of holding the ring somewhere in his throat. While I was operating, my uncle kept his eyes on the suspects.

It seemed rather an extravagant proceeding, but it was carried out. I took the workmen first, and each one passed into the dressing-room and was let out by another door by myself. Then came the turn of the valet.

"I am sorry to do it, Jackson," said my uncle in an apologetic tone, "but I must serve you the same as the others. It will at least clear you of suspicion."

"I shall not resist, Mr. Hudson, but I submit under protest," returned the valet. He spoke in a dignified manner, and I felt really sorry for him. His face was very pale, but he showed no emotion; he was not the kind of man to show his feelings; he always had them wonderfully under control.

He took off his coat and held it out to me, but it was not quite within my reach. I stepped forward to take it from him, and at the same time—with a hasty apology for his rudeness—he advanced to hand it to me. The result was a slight collision and the coat nearly dropped to the floor, but he deftly caught it as it fell and handed it to me.

There was nothing in the coat, except, of course, the man's own property. The waistcoat and trousers, boots and socks followed—in a word, I discovered nothing. Jackson in his turn passed into the dressing-room and out through the other door.

"I'll turn the room inside out! I *will* find it!" shouted my uncle, more annoyed than ever. "Let us begin at once!"

"But what about your meeting?" I asked.

"The meeting be—adjourned!" growled the old gentleman, angrily. "Let's get to work!"

We turned that room upside down; we shifted everything, turned up the carpet, looked on every ledge and in every nook; we even lifted up the trap of the register stove and swept down the soot; but in the end we were forced to own ourselves beaten.

"Oh!" I exclaimed, as an idea struck me. "Perhaps it isn't missing after all—perhaps you slipped it into your own waistcoat pocket!"

I felt quite relieved as I made this suggestion.

"Perhaps I didn't," snarled my uncle. "Do you think that I'm such an idiot to imitate the man who pushed his spectacles up to the top of his head and then went hunting for them all over the house? That was the first thing I thought of, and it doesn't say much for your detective skill that the idea did not occur to you before we began the search."

I felt rather sat on, and contented myself with the remark that, as there was nothing more to be done, we might as well get rid of our sweeps' disguise and make ourselves presentable.

I left my uncle to his own devices, while I went to my room to wash and change my clothes. I did not feel like any more study, and went out for a walk.

As I passed out of the house I met Jackson in the hall.

"No, it isn't fair," I replied to his inquiry. "It's most mysterious. My uncle will no doubt salve your wounded feelings, Jackson; it was rather too bad. And those workmen, tell them to come to me to-morrow and I'll make it right with them. Dashed if I don't think that he lost it before he came in, and only fancied that he took it off!"

"That appears to me the most probable," remarked Jackson deferentially. "Shall I go up and help him to dress, sir, do you think?"

"You might go and make the offer, Jackson," I suggested. "We made ourselves in a beastly mess, and I have had to change my clothes."

I never inquired whether Jackson followed my suggestion or not. The ring was never found, and I settled down to the conviction that my uncle had lost it outside; but I did not open the subject to him—I preferred to let matters rest.

I had thought that one of the men had swallowed the ring, but I dismissed this notion as altogether improbable; I doubt whether either of them could have done such a thing, and had the ring passed into the throat, it is safe to say that the swallower would have required a surgical operation very soon afterwards. As I had previously learnt, Jackson was one of those who have a small swallow, so the hypothesis was out of the question so far as he was concerned. I found out some time later that my uncle had caused all three men to be "shadowed" for several days, but without discovering anything.

Jackson never got over the indignity, and he gave notice to leave before a month had elapsed. He said that he would refer his next employer to my uncle for a reference, and the reference was taken up in a few days. Thus Jackson passed out of our sight.

About a year afterwards I received a letter, bearing the London postmark and written by an unknown hand. I opened it and read it. There was no address and it was signed "T. Jackson."

I am certain that you will be interested to know something about that diamond ring. I took it. I was hard pressed, and I could not resist the temptation, but I was not prepared for the rigorous measures which Mr. Hudson took to discover it. What a pity he did not find it! I am writing this to you, Mr. James, because it may help you in any other detective work which you may undertake!

I had the ring in my waistcoat pocket, and I had to hit upon some desperate expedient in order to get rid of it. I wanted to hide it where I might have the chance of finding it again, but in any case I was bound to get rid of it. Your uncle did not give me the chance to hide it anywhere about the room. And there I was with the ring in my possession when you began to search me!

I had it in by left hand while I was holding out my coat with my right hand. I purposely made you step forward and then did the same myself, so as to bring about a collision. When I caught the coat, I brushed against you, and I put the ring into the little ticket pocket on the outside of your coat. I knew that it was a peculiarity of yours to have that little pocket made deep, and to carry odd things in it, so I concluded that if you felt anything in that pocket without actually putting your finger into it—you would not notice it. These pockets are now made inside the coat; let me advise you to adopt that fashion. It looks bad to have a little pocket bulging out on the outside!

I was afraid that the ring might fall out while you were stooping about the floor, lifting up the carpet, but it didn't; so when I found you had changed your things, I went to your room, took the ring and hid it in a safe place.

I purposely applied for a situation and got my employer to write for a reference, but I never took up the situation. I thought it best to clear out of the country—I owed too much money to feel comfortable. I am doing very well, and you will never know where I am, for this letter will be posted in London for me. Why do I write? Because I can't resist the temptation of having a laugh at you!

I thought it best to destroy this letter, and my uncle never knew that I had received it. GEORGE KNIGHT.

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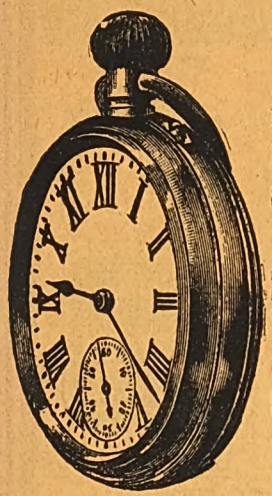

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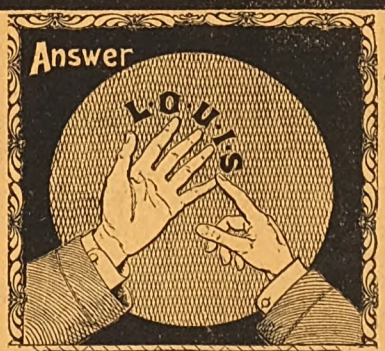

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 631.] For the Week Ending February 2nd, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

THE MASKED BALL.

A DETECTIVE is well used to the unusual and to meeting as cold facts what, when told, seems a tissue of the wildest improbabilities. During my experience I have had one case which for certain strange features I have never had surpassed.

It occurred years ago, on the evening of the masked ball. I was free and attended it. It was the usual thing. The Conservatoire of Music was filled with gay women and young fellows about town. By twelve o'clock the hilarity was beginning to get well under way. My attention had been particularly drawn to one young woman. She was not very tall, but had a lovely figure. She was dressed like a columbine.

I noticed her because she was such an exquisitely graceful dancer. Her small feet, cased in gold shoes with high heels, twinkled as prettily as possible as they lightly touched the waxed floor. The dancing was an intense pleasure to her evidently. She could hardly keep her feet still during any pause in which she had not to move.

As I was standing near the door looking at her, a party of several young men came into the room. They stood and looked about and passed remarks on the scene as if they had not yet become acquainted with its features. They had been to a theatre, probably, and came to the ball after it. The eyes and cheeks of two or three of them were bright, as if they had been drinking. One young fellow seemed to be the object of much attention from the others.

He was a German, of medium height, with blue eyes and very fair hair, while a rich colour mantled in his cheeks. The others addressed him in German or French, and called him "Graf." From his manner and appearance it did not require much astuteness to conclude that he was a young German of rank who was visiting the country.

One of his companions turned to him with a broad smile and made some remark, pointing out one of the dancers.

I looked in the direction and saw my pretty Columbine pirouetting gracefully around, with her arms stretched out to her partner, a big fellow who was a little muddled with wine, and who has strayed out of the orbit of the girl in a turn in the dance. She was not going to be baulked of her share in the measure, and tripped about by herself quite contentedly till he should come back.

I glanced at the group of fellows to see if it was she they were observing.

A change had come over the German. His face was as white as death, and his eyes were dilated and fixed. He had fallen a little back from the others, as if he did not wish to be observed. This was interesting, and I felt my professional instincts aroused. A moment after he made some proposal or said something that seemed to be a surprise to them, and I saw them shake hands with him. He left the hall in a hurried way.

I slipped after him. I wished to see what he did. He stood for a moment in the entrance hall, and I saw his hands clench fiercely. Then, in a distraught sort of way, he walked round to one of the other entrances to the ball-room, and looked about among the dancers. He tried to get where he could not be seen, and there was a fierce scowl on his face.

All at once he walked into the saloon, with an attempt at careless ease, and approached a masker who wore the costume of a Franciscan friar—a roomy brown suit, with a rope knotted at his waist for a girdle, and a large hood to it which he had pulled up over his head.

The young German spoke to him, and then drew him out of the room. In the corridor he spoke more earnestly to him. The man seemed to be declining some invitation or request. But after a few moments of earnest speech from the German, the two walked

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away, and, keeping them in view, I saw the two leave the place.

I was at first tempted to follow them. But having no more definite purpose than to see what would come of their movements, I decided to remain, and witness the fun at the ball, which always grew fast and furious in the small hours of the morning.

So I resumed my old post and amused myself by watching the reckless extravagance of the mob of revellers.

While Columbine was resting after an especially lively dance, I saw the Franciscan monk enter the room and seat himself at her side.

He made some remarks to her. She coquettishly

The young German spoke to him, and then drew him out of the room.

answered them. Then to another she shook her head with playful determination. The monk pressed the point, for he bent forward, though I noticed that when she turned towards him he seemed to shrink back.

Finally Columbine sprang to her feet, took his arm, and, with a half-regretful glance at the merry dancers, left the room with him.

The next day the evening papers had a startling story. I have kept the newspaper account. It was this:

"A Sequel to the Masked Ball."

"People who were at the masked ball last night in the Conservatoire of Music may have remarked a young woman dressed as Columbine, who excited a good deal of attention by her graceful dancing. She is lying at the mortuary to-day, dead, waiting to be identified. It seems a cruel mockery, after her last night's gaiety, to behold her now, in her ball dress of black and yellow velvet, lying till someone shall tell who she is.

"The young girl was strangled to death last night in a carriage. She left the ball with someone dressed like a Franciscan monk at two o'clock. The monk gave to the driver a card, on which he had written an address. He also gave the driver a sovereign. All this without a word. He was closely masked. The driver had only remarked that his hand was very white and smooth, and that he wore a heavy plain gold ring.

"The two got in and he drove off. While he was driving along he heard a sound which attracted his attention. On looking round he saw that the door of the carriage was open. He stopped, reached back with his whip, and banged it to. He supposed the couple inside were probably the worse for the wine they had taken at the ball, and had either failed to shut the door, which had worked open, or that the handle of the door had been fiddled with till it opened, and they were too far gone to notice it.

"When he reached his destination, he got off the box and opened the carriage door.

"A lamp-post in front of the house lit up the carriage. The curtains of the carriage windows had been drawn. They were not drawn when the couple got in. What he saw terrified him. Columbine was lying, with her white wraps fallen about her, between the seats, and a monk's frock and a girdle of rope, together with a mask, were tossed on a seat. The monk had disappeared!

"The driver shook the girl and tried to rouse her, but could not. He pulled her forward, then saw that her face was frightfully red and that the eyes were puffed. On the throat were the marks of fingers where a terrible grip had been taken of her neck.

"The story was clear enough. The monk, whoever he was, had strangled the girl in the vehicle, and had then thrown off his disguise and let himself out of the door while the carriage was still in motion.

"The cabman drove at once to the nearest police-station and told his story. The body was taken to the mortuary. The detectives are at work on the case, which promises to be a very exciting one. Known: A man dressed as a monk who was at the masked ball, and who had a smooth, white hand, on which he wears, or wore, a plain gold ring. Unknown: The murderer. Who is the detective that will run down the game?"

"Here he is," I said to myself as I finished reading the account. I had more points than the paper gave. The scenes at the ball came back to me vividly now.—the sudden deathly paleness of the German stranger and his departure with the Franciscan friar! There was a connection here that was too evident to be passed over.

I determined to find out who had murdered the pretty Columbine, who had won me so by her graceful dancing and smiling good-humour. Early next morning I went to the mortuary. There she lay, the dainty figure stretched out so stiff and cold in the big gloomy room. What a contrast to the scene in which I had seen her last!

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I found that a beautiful emerald which I noticed pinned in her corsage on the night of the ball was gone. It had been rudely plucked away, for the lace about the edge of her dress was torn and hanging. But a large ring of rubies and diamonds had been left on her finger and was kept at the station. I had noticed the emerald because it had an old-fashioned setting in gold, and impressed me as a family jewel.

I made a tour of all the swell hotels in the city and examined their registers. In one near Charing Cross I found the entry, "Count Hermann Stolzberger and servant." He had arrived three days before.

I engaged a room at the hotel, for I felt I must watch this man. I had inquired if Count Stolzberger had left town, and the clerk had told me no. Was he in now? No. He had gone out with friends and would not be back for dinner.

That evening I lounged round the office, sitting in the long corridor into which the door from the street opened. I waited until twelve. No count! I prolonged my guard for an hour more, and he had not appeared. I wished above all to get a look at Count Hermann Stolzberger. He might, perhaps, remain out all night. On the other hand, he possibly had been detained by friends and would yet return. I waited!

My patience was rewarded. At half-past one a cab rolled up to the door, and a young man in a large overcoat, somewhat foreign in its style, sprang out and walked with a quick, nervous tread along the corridor. He walked rapidly past, but my eye had taken him in from the moment he opened the door. My memory for faces is excellent. I recognised the fair hair and complexion of the Count at once, though there was not much colour in his cheeks, and his face looked worn and thin. Count Hermann Stolzberger was the young German who had entered the Masked Ball, and turned pale at the sight of the Columbine.

I have said that this case almost seemed to unroll itself for me; but there were two or three connections to be made to constitute proof, and not leave me with a distinct suspicion only. The body was identified as that of Marie Colombe; she had been in London about a fortnight and was engaged at a costumier's, but nothing more was known of her antecedents.

A costumier had claimed the Franciscan's robe. I fancy he did this more through curiosity to find if it was the one he had let, than on the account of the value of it, for it must have been very cheap. I got the address of this man and called on him. I asked him if he remembered the man who had hired it.

He said he did. It was a smooth-faced, dark-complexioned man of about forty. He remembered, because he had made some joke with him about his being clean-shaven enough for a monk.

The man had given no address, and he did not know who he was. This was a slight hitch in the proceedings. I was convinced that the murderer in the garb of the Franciscan friar was not the man who had engaged it of the costumier, but the German. He was of much the same size and build as the original monk, and so he had assumed the loose brown habit without exciting my attention. But the fact of the German's turning so pale and calling the monk out from the dance had made me feel that he was the one who had strangled the gay Columbine in the carriage that night.

The Count tore open the envelope and read the note.

The Count seemed to grow visibly thinner. There was a drawn look on his face, and during the time that the dead girl lay at the mortuary he seemed to be held by some terrible thought.

The colour had became faint in his cheeks, and his eyes had a haggard look. When he was with others he would affect a gaiety that drove much of this distressing expression from his face; but when he came home alone it was very marked.

Something had to be done if I was to secure the proof that would convict the Count. It was the third day since I had come to the hotel and busied myself in studying him. He had gone to the reading-room, contrary to his usual habit, after finishing his breakfast.

While he was there two of his friends came in, and they began conversing together. I slipped across the way and hastily wrote a message, sealed it, and charged a messenger-boy to deliver it, saying that he was to wait and see if any answer would be given.

I hurried back to the reading-room of the hotel again. The Count and his friends were still there. If they only remained till the messenger arrived! I had seated myself in a corner behind some one, but with my eyes commanding a full view of the three. The message did come before they left. The Count tore open the envelope and read the note. I could not but admire his self-control. The nostrils expanded and hardened, and a stolid look crept into his eyes for a moment; but that was all.

What he read was this: "You know and I know

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whose hands left those marks on the throat. Why do you not wear your gold ring?"

He remained in thought for a moment. Then he lightly excused himself to his friends and went out, having asked something of the servant. He was not gone very long. When he returned he talked easily to his two friends, and after a little while they went out together.

When he came in that night a letter was waiting for him which had come by post. "What good did it do to kill Columbine?" was all there was in it.

The next morning when he awoke he found a note under his door. Its contents were these words: "Is it harder to be choked to death by ten fingers or by a rope?"

The evening of the following day he received another message. It ran: "Leave London at once if you would save your neck."

The Count was too sharp for me. He did not go; but he did not go out so much in the daytime.

One morning he went out about the hour he generally left the hotel. It was the fourth day after the note which advised him to leave London. He went directly to a station and took train for Manchester. I was prepared for this emergency, and went by the same train.

When it arrived in Manchester, he went to an hotel and registered as Karl Schlechter. He had not been in his room half an hour when a note was given him. It had been sent by a messenger-boy. "Karl Schlechter is Count Herman Stolzberger, and the halter is as near him here as in London," ran the note.

He left the place that night after sending a telegram. Probably, it was to his man in London. He went to Glasgow. A note was handed to him in the same way as soon as he had got well settled at his hotel: "The ghost of a strangled girl does not care for place."

He remained here only a day, sending another telegram. Before the train started which carried him away, he walked along the platform deliberately looking at the passengers in the carriages.

He came back to Liverpool, where the old story was repeated, "Eyes sharper than your own are still on you. You cannot escape the hold of your murdered victim."

The next step was to Cardiff.

He went through the same tactics on the platform and his sharp eye took me in.

A new note reached him in Cardiff.

"It may not be long before we meet again, and then my fingers will be at your throat."

In the evening after dinner he was in the billiard-room of the hotel.

He saw me there and finally came and seated himself by my side. He engaged me in conversation. He spoke English in a broken way which there is no need to reproduce.

"Was I from London?" he began.

"Yes."

"Are you travelling for pleasure or business?" he asked next.

"For pleasure," I answered.

"A foreigner is a little surprised when he sees an Englishman travelling in his own country. It seems as if he must be familiar with it. Where are you going from here?"

"Oh, I am not settled. I drift where the humour takes me."

I saw I had become a subject of his suspicions. But he did not yet know me as the author of the notes.

He did not remain long in Cardiff. I went from the place when he did. He had noticed me once or twice and felt certain I was following him. He went to Chester. When we arrived there, he gave some order to a cabman, before stepping into the cab. I engaged another cabman.

"Follow that cab until the man gets out, but only keep close enough to know where it goes."

The cab in which the Count was seated travelled about without any definite termination apparently. He wished to know if anyone were following him, and had told the cabman to see if another cab were after him. He soon found there was, and then he drove at once to the hotel, and hurried into the office.

I got there a few minutes later. I made inquiries. His name was not on the book at all. I looked about the place and found him sitting not far off. He had begun to watch me. I went downstairs and gave a note to one of the boys and arranged for it to be delivered to Count Stolzberger. I had prepared it beforehand, so I was only gone a moment. He kept me well in view as much as he could. When he finally entered his name, he signed his right name, Count Stolzberger, and the clerk gave him the message which had been brought in.

He seemed puzzled. He had kept me in view ever since I arrived, and I had had no time to write a note. So for a moment he did not know what to think. The note had said:

"The man who lent you the costume of the friar has been found. There are not many more turns for you now. This man will recognise you when he sees you. Other witnesses will prove that you spoke to Columbine, drove off with her, and that the poor girl was found dead after your disappearance. What is wanting to fit the rope to your neck?"

He engaged his room, and soon after he had gone to it a boy came to me and asked me to go to the Count's room for a few moments.

Count Stolzberger was sitting in an easy-chair near a table, on which there were writing-materials. He rose, greeted me with dignity, and motioned me to a chair, asking me to sit down.

"You remember that we both came from Cardiff?"

"We may have done so," I answered.

"I have been doing a little detective business with you for its object, and my investigation has shown me that you are a detective, and that you are engaged in working up the case of the girl who was murdered after the Masked Ball. I am right, am I not?" he inquired, all in the same calm, measured way.

"Yes," I replied. "I have been keeping you in sight, Count, until the necessary proofs were obtained that would convict the murderer."

"You fancy that I am the one who did the deed?" he asked, in the same measured tones.

"I know it," I answered quietly, but with an air of conviction.

"The several notes I have received were from you, I suppose," he continued, in his easy, careless tones.

"Yes."

"And you have the proof that I am the murderer?" he inquired, turning his eyes unflinchingly on me.

I smiled.

"Count, I fear that everything is against you!"

"You would be sadly mortified to find you were mistaken, I presume?"

"I should be much surprised," I returned again, with a quiet smile.

"What time did the conveyance drive off with the monk and the girl?" he asked me.

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"At ten minutes past two. The driver noted the time."

"Well, let me tell you something that may modify your search in the business. I had made arrangements to leave with the girl. I did not wish in any way to be connected with her departure. So just when we were ready to go down to the vehicle I told her to wait for me at the entrance for five minutes. So she said she would and went down.

"I had put on the monk's garb over my evening dress. I threw it off and left it in one of the dressing-rooms. I hurried back to the ball and made it a point to show myself to several persons who knew me. I feared that possibly some one had seen me talk to the monk, and would connect this with the disappearance of Columbine afterwards with a monk. This was my reason for conspicuously showing myself after she had gone out with me in the monk's dress.

"I was not away more than six or seven minutes, when I went back to the dressing-room to put on the disguise again. It was gone! I searched in the neighbouring rooms, thinking someone might have moved it to some other place. I could not find it. I then hastened down to the entrance to go with the Columbine in my dress-suit, with a mask on, for I had slipped that in my breast.

"The girl was not there! I inquired of some of the bystanders, and they told me that a monk had got into a carriage with her not five minutes before. Who that monk was I am as ignorant as yourself. You have followed a false clue. I did *not* go with the girl, and can prove an alibi for the next two hours after she drove off. Several of my friends were with me from then till I went to my hotel, and my man knows the hour when I came home with them. I was terribly shocked the next day when I heard of her death."

I felt considerably taken back and very foolish. The Count's accents were those of truth, and afterwards his assertions were fully borne out by witnesses.

"But what were your relations to the girl?" I asked, unwilling to acknowledge defeat, and yet convinced that the Count was speaking the truth. "Why were you so anxious to give people the idea that you were not going with the girl in the guise of a monk, and why did you not face the matter out in London instead of travelling all over the country?"

"I will tell you as well as I can," replied the Count, after a pause. "I must go back a little.

"My father was a captain of Uhlans, and took part in the war between Germany and France in 1870. At Amiens he ordered a Frenchman to be shot for having brutally murdered one of the Uhlans.

"Years passed, and my father died. My mother advertised for a French maid—it was against my wish, for I do not understand why we Germans should adopt the ways of other people. The girl who obtained the situation was the girl who was killed the other night. She was the daughter of that Frenchman and was but a baby at that time, but she seems to have been imbued with a desire to avenge her father's death on my father or on some member of his family. She watched for her opportunity, and it came when she obtained the position of maid to my mother. Of course, we did not know that until afterwards."

"Of course not," I assented.

"In the end she administered poison to my mother, which narrowly resulted in the death of my parent. She fled, taking with her an emerald which had been in our family for generations, and was regarded by all of us with superstitious awe—even I have a half-belief in it.

"The superstition is that, if the emerald is lost to the family, every member of the family alive at the time of its loss will meet with a violent death. My mother and I were the only two alive at the time the girl took it, and my mother recovered from the poison, only to be thrown out of her carriage and killed."

"How long was that ago?" I asked, feeling much interested.

"Nearly a year. I tried to find the girl and to trace

I made it my business to scrape acquaintance with him, and give him plenty to drink.

the emerald, but without success. Imagine my surprise when I saw both at the ball. I resolved to regain possession of the gem, so I had speech with the girl, and threatened to hand her over to justice for attempted murder if she did not give me the emerald. She was a daring, revengeful, and hardened creature, and she refused. Finally, seeing that I was in earnest, she asked me to drive away with her, and she would give it up to me in the vehicle; she pretended that she could not give it to me at once without exciting suspicion.

"I have now no doubt that it was a scheme to get away from me, but I fell in with it because I was anxious to get back the emerald. I meant to have it, even if I took it from her by force; hence my showing myself in evening dress and so on.

"I was enraged when I found that she had eluded me, after all; but I was horrified when, on the following

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day, I heard that she had been strangled and that my emerald had been taken. I believe that the reason that I tried to escape from the man who was tracking me instead of facing the matter, was my belief in the superstition about dying a violent death after losing the stone."

That was all the Count could tell me, and I had to give up further research for the time; but later on I made inquiries in Amiens, and gradually solved the mystery of the murder. I found that Marie Colombe, as I will continue to call her, had boldly returned to her native place after her flight from the Count's mansion. There she had deliberately plotted the ruin of a young fellow upon whom her affections had been fixed, but who by no means entertained similar feelings towards her. She had succeeded in bringing about his disgrace by a trumped-up charge of a particularly heinous character—at least, both the young fellow and his relatives said the charge was false; but the unfortunate man was obliged to leave the country and go to America.

His *fiancée* left Amiens shortly afterwards, suddenly and without giving her parents the least notice of her intention. It was about three months afterwards when her parents received a letter from America which told them that their daughter had married the man of her choice, whom she believed to be innocent.

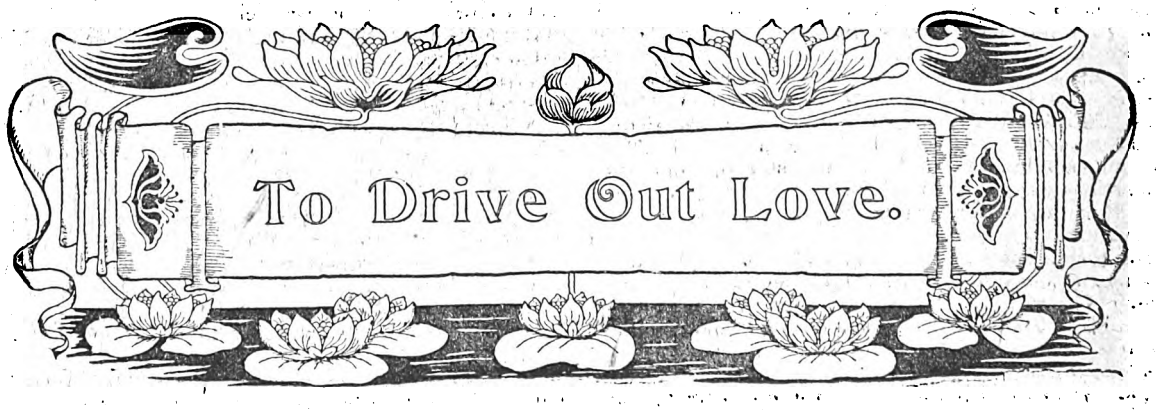
"A woman will do everything for the man she loves," the letter concluded, "and before travelling to America, I was able to avenge the wrong done to my husband. The chance came while I was in London, where I stayed with old Barbette, who helped me to get across the Atlantic—I chose to go that way to avoid being overtaken.

"I went to a masked ball and I saw the woman who had wrought the mischief. She was going away with a man dressed as a monk. I am tall for a woman, and it is easy to give an address which you have seen written. Marie Colombe will do no more mischief and her emerald is at the bottom of the ocean."

I admit having done a very mean thing in order to get a sight of that letter. Her parents, although they knew nothing of the exact circumstances, were cute enough to understand that it compromised their daughter and had never shown it to anyone or revealed the full contents. But having heard that the father had let slip one or two significant remarks after having partaken a little too freely of liquor, I made it my business to scrape acquaintance with him and give him plenty to drink. The result was that, under a pledge of secrecy, I was permitted to read the letter.

I fathomed the mystery during a holiday and just to satisfy my professional pride, but I never made professional use of my knowledge. In fact, I never knew in what part of America the young people resided.

Lawrence Boyne.



"Hist! Oh, go quickly, someone is coming!"

The girl fancied that she had detected a sound near them and she freed herself from her lover's embrace; but he clasped her again in his arms and their lips met in the first kiss.

"I love you," he exclaimed with intense feeling. "It is nothing, don't be alarmed. Tell me that you love me!"

The girl, reassured, yielded to his embrace. "I will never marry anyone but you!" she whispered softly.

"We love each other, and yet we do not know one another's names," he said caressingly. "Such is the power of love! Now you must tell me your name. I can guess it is sweet, as befits——"

Again that sound, and nearer! There was no doubt about it this time: with a suppressed cry of fear the girl tore herself away and darted swiftly along the narrow path by the convent wall and disappeared.

The man, knowing that he was trespassing and anxious to avoid a meeting that might lead to disagreeable consequences to the girl, ran in the opposite direction till he came to the point where he could scale the wall more easily, and then clambered up and dropped into the open thoroughfare on the other side.

"If I had been caught," he murmured as he hurried along, "they might have connected me with her, although I don't see how. Otherwise I would not have minded the adventure—Fancy Moran on the wrong side of a convent wall! Poor girl, I hope she has escaped!"

Victor Moran was an actor, a member of the Comédie Française, and neither better nor worse than most men of his time (the first half of the eighteenth century). He had seen this sweet-faced girl of seventeen by accident one day; he knew that she was a scholar in the Carmelite Convent and, animated by the reckless, adventurous spirit of the day, he had resolved to pay court to her.

He had succeeded in attracting her attention and in

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sending a note to her; he was a distinctly handsome man and the girl fell in love with him, returning an answer to his notes and finally agreeing to a meeting. Victor Moran fixed the trysting place—under the shadow of the wall; it would be easy for him to scale the mass of stone and cement, while she would merely have to leave the convent building and make her way through the spacious grounds. The meeting took place and we have seen the result.

Victor Moran had begun this adventure with the simple idea of gratifying his vanity of making a conquest, but as he wended his way back to his lodgings he had to confess to himself that he had been caught in his own trap. He was in love, deeply in love, with a girl who was unknown to him and to whom he was unknown—a pretty, artless girl, capable of intense feeling, for whom a man would be willing to give up his life. He had discovered this by intuition rather than by experience, although even in her letters there was a spirit of goodness which, unrecognised by him at first, now forced itself clearly upon his mind.

He succeeded in passing another note to the object of his new born affection, and at the time he had appointed he once more scaled the Convent wall. But he was doomed to disappointment; he waited for nearly an hour, but she did not appear, and he returned with a sorrowful heart.

Two months went by without his seeing her, but his love for her increased. It was a novel experience for Victor Moran to be consumed by this strange passion; he would have laughed at it only a short time previously. Her image was constantly before him and he was ever on the watch for the sweet unknown.

He was cast for the part of a Turkish nobleman in a new play by Voltaire; the character was that of a man noble in name and in nature, and Moran, rising to the occasion, played it with consummate skill. The first performance was a grand success, and the second representation of the play was looked forward to by all the high personages who patronised the theatre.

Moran was in the midst of one of his lofty and soul-stirring monologues when his eyes wandered to a particular box.

The flow of language suddenly ceased and Moran remained mute. In that box he saw the girl he loved.

The prompter, thinking that Moran's memory had failed him for the moment gave him the cue; recalled to himself by the voices of the prompter and by the murmur which arose from the audience, Moran made an effort and went on with his lines.

But now he was playing for her; there was no one else in the theatre, so far as he was concerned, and he cared nothing for the approval of others.—He knew nothing of it—he wanted her approbation, and hers only.

When the play was finished she left the box in the company of the elderly gentleman who was its other occupant.

Moran wanted to run after her, but he was still in Eastern garb and dared not venture in the street in that guise. Voltaire had just introduced the novelty of actors dressing in a costume suitable for the part—it had up till then been the common usage to speak one's lines attired in ordinary everyday clothes, without regard to the character, and to have ventured into the open in that dress would have been an invitation to the roughs to fall foul of him. He was obliged to wait until he had changed his clothes but by that time the unknown had disappeared.

He wanted to ask who this girl was, but he was afraid to make inquiries concerning the name of the gentleman who had hired the box for that evening.

Afraid? Yes, it might almost be said that he was ashamed; it was an entirely new sensation, but it arose from the certainty that if he made the enquiry it would come to the ears of some of his companions and would give them an opportunity to make jests in which his name would be coupled with that of the girl. And he would not subject her, even unconsciously on her part, to such disparagement.

About a week later she was again at the theatre with the elderly gentleman.

Moran again forgot the whole house and played for her, watching her for any sign that would tell him she still loved him.

He saw how sympathetic she was, how much his eloquent periods moved her, how constantly her eyes followed him and he was happy. He was good at heart, and this love was bringing out all his finer qualities and suppressing the bad ones.

Once more he tried to overtake her after she had left the theatre, but the change of costume took so long. He might have engaged someone to find out what he wished to know, but he shrank from so doing.

"She loves me! She loves me!" he said to himself many times each day.

He looked for her at each performance, but another week elapsed before he saw her in the box. He had made up his mind that he would follow her this time, and had so arranged that he could change his attire without the slightest delay; he was out in the street in time to see a carriage disappear at the end of the street, but after following it for some distance he was grievously disappointed to find that he had been following someone else.

The run of that piece was soon over, and Moran saw no more of his loved one. He was seated in his little sitting room one day about two months after the last visit of the girl to the theatre, when he was informed that a gentleman wished to see him. He told the porter to show the visitor in, and the invitation was quickly followed by the entrance of a man of noble demeanour whom Moran immediately recognised as the other occupant of the stage box.

"I have come to ask your assistance in a difficult matter, Monsieur Moran," said the new comer, without troubling to introduce himself. "I know you are in a position to help me, and the object of this visit is to induce you to do so."

"Pray be seated, monsieur," returned Moran politely, offering his visitor a chair. "I shall be delighted if I can be of service."

"The matter of which I speak is this: A young lady belonging to one of the noblest families of France is asked to marry a man of equal rank. The marriage has the approval of his Majesty the King—nay, it is his Majesty's desire that this union should be consummated. But the young lady flatly refuses. Why? Because, so she says and I believe it to be true, she is irrevocably in love with another man."

The visitor paused for breath, for he had spoken quickly and in a manner that denoted anxiety. Moran waited in silence for him to continue.

"What would you do in such a case, Monsieur Moran?"

"I?" stammered Moran, surprised at the question.

"Yes; I ask your advice."

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"I should allow her to marry the man she loves!"

"But that is impossible!" exclaimed the visitor in decisive tones. "The man with whom she is in love is far below her in position. He is a man of honour, I doubt not; but he is only an actor. I mean no offence, but if you consider that her father is one of the noblest of the peers of France, you will understand how great is the difference between them and you will recognise that she cannot marry him."

"But if she loves him, how can she marry the other man?" objected Moran.

"I will tell you how it can be done," said the visitor, rising and placing his hand on Moran's shoulder.

The latter rose and faced him.

"Monsieur Moran, I am the Duke of Antin, the young lady is my daughter, and the man whom she says she loves is—you!"

Moran turned pale and trembled.

"You see what an immense gulf lies between you." pursued the Duke, more firmly now. "The way to make my daughter willing to contract this marriage which is so suitable, so desirable in every respect, is to drive out love by inspiring disgust. You can do this, and you will be rendering her a service. You must see that it is utterly impossible for her to marry you, and if you really love her you will not attempt to drag her down to your level. Then, if she can't marry you, why not make it possible for her to marry the peer who desires to possess her. You are an actor and can play a part with skill; it will be a sacrifice worthy of a great love, to kill her affection for you by playing a part that will cause her to loathe you."

Moran stood like one stunned; his thoughts chased one another through his mind with the rapidity of lightning. He recognised the truth of it all, but—oh! —how hard and cruel fate was to him!

"What do you wish me to do?" he asked, in a strange voice, after a long pause.

The next day Moran presented himself at the mansion of the Duke of Antin as a guest invited to dinner. He was not unaccustomed to the aspect of luxury, but the magnificence which confronted him at the very entrance of the Duke's residence was sufficient to abash him. A gorgeously-attired lackey announced his arrival, and he saw the Duke, leading his daughter by the hand, approaching to greet him.

"My dear, this is Monsieur Moran, the distinguished actor, who has consented to honour our table by his presence at dinner."

The Duke spoke in his courtliest manner; he could not have done more honour to a peer of equal rank with himself.

Mademoiselle Marie de Voudrin acknowledged Moran's salute with the utmost grace. Their eyes met for a moment and then they avoided each other's gaze. Both were extremely pale.

Moran thought of his own position in comparison with that of the girl he loved, and the reflection strengthened his determination to play the part which her father had asked him.

It was for her, he thought, and he nerved himself for the effort.

It was a family dinner party, so there were only those three at the table.

Having overcome his repugnance at playing the part that was to drive out love and inspire loathing, Moran lent himself to his task with all the skill of which he was capable.

He partook freely of the wine, and pretended that this beverage had its effect upon him. He behaved at the table like an ill-bred and vulgar member of the proletariat rather than like the gentleman he really was.

As the wine gradually muddled his brain, he sang snatches of vulgar songs, related coarse jokes and made himself in every way an object of disgust.

By the time the dinner was at an end he was to all appearances in such a disreputable condition that he was certainly not fit to dine with lackeys, to say nothing of the company in which he found himself.

As a climax, he slipped off his chair in the very midst of a drunken song, dragging the cloth with him and falling under the table to the sound of breaking plates and glass.

The girl left the table, her eyes distended with an expression which her father translated as one of ineffable disgust. When Moran heard the door shut he picked himself up and stood erect, tears falling from his eyes down his cheeks.

"Superb! Magnificent!" ejaculated the Duke, unable to find words to fittingly express his admiration. "You are a grand actor; you played that part with a skill beyond comparison. I believe my daughter simply hates the sight of you now. How can I ever repay you? Here, take this purse of gold, and I will send you ten times as much more! You refuse? But such skill ought to be well paid! Why, you have acted so admirably that there are actually real tears coming from your eyes! You must——"

But Moran cut him short by rushing from the room, his grief finding vent in a flood of tears which he could not repress.

The bells of the church were ringing, carriages were driving up to the door one after another, and people were standing in crowds to watch and satisfy their idle curiosity. Moran felt a pang at his heart. He heard one of the crowd utter the names of the Duke of Antin and his daughter, so he turned his steps in another direction and hurried away.

"Yes, I have succeeded! To-day she is to be married to a man of equal rank. A man whom she will be able to love now that she despises me!"

It was a bitter thought; he would not have altered the circumstances even if he could, for it was for the best. He had argued it out with himself many times, and each time he ended with the same decision, yet the argument was gone through on each successive day just as though it had never arisen before.

What was life to him now? He had, at first, thought of putting an end to his existence, but such a course would have been dishonourable alike to her and to himself. He must live it out.

In this frame of mind he arrived at his lodgings, and the first thing he saw was an envelope addressed to himself, in a handwriting that sent a thrill through and through him. He tore it open and read these lines:

"It was a noble sacrifice, worthy of a great love. It was only a part which you played, it was not real; the eyes of love are keen, and I saw through the plot. As it is decreed by fate that I cannot marry you, I will marry no other man; I vowed it that night under the convent wall, and I meant what I said. As I cannot enjoy the love of the man of my choice, the light is gone from this world for me, and I am about to take the veil. By the time this letter reaches you, the name of Marie de Voudrin will be a thing of the past, and she who bore it will be known as Sister Martha."

G. E. LINGEN.

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THE LION'S WARS

The Two Great Burmese Wars of 1823-6 and 1854-6

HOW WE ACQUIRED BRITISH BURMAH.

OUR wars in India have been so numerous that at one time there existed a pretty general belief that the majority might have been averted, had we adopted a less masterful policy with the native rulers. For instance, in the war with Burmah it was held that the Bengal government had acted with great precipitancy; and we thought so too, till a thorough examination of the events which preceded the conflict, convinced us that the ceaseless intrigues of the Burmese with the native Princes of India rendered hostilities sooner or later inevitable.

Burmah lies on the eastern shore of the Bay of Bengal, and its lands extend along the valley of the Irrawady. At the time of its conquest by Britain, Burmah was peopled by a race with a Thibet-Chinese origin, the original dynasty being known as the Sovereignity of Ava. The kingdom of Ava came to an end in 1750.

A warlike chief, Alungpaya, installed himself as ruler, bequeathing to his successors a policy of expansion which they dutifully endeavoured to carry out. One of them in 1784 annexed Arrakan, and another in 1808 added Assam to his dominions.

The extending policy of their rulers was highly pleasing to the Burmese.

Afflicted with a colossal vanity, they regarded themselves as quite the foremost nation in the world.

Consequently, when they learnt that their traditional policy would not be tolerated by the authorities in Calcutta, they gave the envoy we sent them to understand that they looked upon us as interlopers and that if we attempted to prevent them from enlarging their dominions they should drive us out of the country.

Our statesmen, feeling that India required a period of repose after so many wars, sent two embassies to Ava to try and arrange matters amicably; but, as usual with Oriental races who believe only in force, our remonstrances were treated as signs of fear, and as they were densely ignorant of our power and resources, the members of the second mission were treated in the most insolent fashion.

The resources of diplomacy being exhausted, war was formally declared on February 24th, 1824.

From the first it became apparent that, apart from the warlike character of the people, Lower Burmah was not an ideal country for military operations. A region of forest and morass, the country, even when not inundated, was covered with so many pestilential swamps as to make a prolonged stay extremely dangerous. Little, too, was known of the country, save in the neighbourhood of the rivers. Indeed, the greater part may be said to have been quite unexplored.

To march an army several hundred miles through an enemy's country is always a hazardous operation, but when the population is hostile, and maps are not to be had, the risks are vastly increased.

The defensive methods of the Burmese in war were

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admirably adapted to the country. In the old days, when hostile tribes warred with each other, they retarded, if indeed they did not prevent, the progress of the adversary by series of stockades over twenty feet high, of enormous strength, and intrenchments. Inside these stockades high platforms carried numerous guns discharging balls of about twelve ounces.

The army sent consisted of 11,000 men under General Sir Archibald Campbell. On May 11th, 1824, the troops ascended the Irrawady and blockaded Rangoon. Then came the rains, the damp heat causing so much sickness that in a short time almost the entire army was unfit for duty. Enough men were left, however, to attack Kamainet, which boasted of a stockade believed by the Burmese to be impregnable.

It was no doubt a formidable specimen of native fortification, and was, moreover, defended by thirty pieces of artillery; but our men soon stormed it, one result of the victory being that Synam, the ancient capital of Pegu, fell into our hands. This reverse somewhat lowered the belief of the Burmese in their invincibility, but their arrogance temporarily revived after the defeat of Colonel Smith and a brigade of native infantry at Kaiklu, October 7th, 1824. Then a crushing defeat at Kokein on December 15th again discouraged them. The resistance offered was so feeble that we had little difficulty in capturing Assam.

A couple of victories led to this province being formally annexed January 25th, 1825. These successes encouraged Calcutta to make a fresh effort to subjugate the Burmese, so two more expeditions were got ready, the main object being to capture Ava. One of 11,000 men under General Morrison was to proceed by way of Chittagong across the mountains to Ava.

The other, 7,000 strong, under Colonel Smith was to traverse Kachar and then march along the valley of the Ningti till a union was effected. The plan miscarried, the forests, rivers, and swamps encountered were so numerous, that after struggling for two months Colonel Smith returned.

The army of General Morrison fared but little better. The Burmese proved on acquaintance to be a deal more cunning than courageous. They made no effort to prevent us conquering Arakan, their plan being to lure us into the interior, where the unhealthiness of the climate might be trusted to decimate our numbers. After struggling for four months to defeat Generals Fever and Dysentery, the army was withdrawn to the coast.

In the following year, 1825, General Campbell renewed the attempt to penetrate the unknown fastnesses and pestilential jungles of Chittagong at a point the Burmese least expected. This time the force was divided into three expeditions under the respective commands of Generals Campbell, Cotton, and Major (afterwards Sir Robert) Sale. On the last named officer reaching Bassien the Burmese fired the town and retired. Not knowing what to do next, in fact greatly perplexed, Sale returned to Rangoon.

General Cotton fared even worse. Ascending the Irrawady his men made a most gallant attempt to storm Donabem. But the stockade which surrounded the town was so strong, and the 140 guns protecting it so ably served, that the losses increased with such rapidity that 12,000 picked men of the Burmese army were induced to leave the stockade and attack us in the open.

The qualities they exhibited were not quite so phenomenal as one had been led to believe, but they fought so well that it took our men two hours to drive them back.

From the 3rd to the 23rd of April we fought a series of pitched battles, in which, although vastly outnumbered, we drove them from every position they took up.

On the 25th of April we entered Prome.

After this the enemy so lost heart that it was seldom they could be got to make a stand.

When their forces—swelled by reinforcements—reached a total of 30,000 men they would carefully select a position and wait for us to attack them, but the result was always the same.

They were good soldiers, more than a match probably for any native troops, but they could not stand the determined rushes of the red-coats.

In February, 1826, we had penetrated to Vandabu, sixty miles from Ava.

With no prospect of staying our advance the now humbled Burmese concluded a treaty, making over to us Arrakan and and Tenasserim.

In addition they paid us a crore of rupees, not so much to defray the expenses of the war but as a proof of their submission.

The Burmese, however, did not long retain their kindly sentiments for us. Besides exacting land and money, we had compelled them to accept the presence of a British Resident at Ava. The Burmese emperor, who called himself the Elder Brother of China and "the Lord which is the greatest of Kings," naturally regarded with intense hatred the civilian gentleman who kept such a watchful eye over the interests of the British traders, and grew so stern when the detested treaty was infringed—detested chiefly because the emperor knew that it was entered into by the predecessor whom he had got rid of.

It was not pleasant, after killing off all the reigning family in order to render his own dynasty secure, to have his supremacy disputed by a barbarian envoy. The Burmese sovereign having resolved to be master in his own dominions, proceeded to treat our representative with such marked discourtesy that in 1840 the Resident retired to Rangoon.

During the next twelve years diplomatic relations were suspended. Twelve years is so long a time that the emperor at last began to think that the British lion had gone to sleep. He presently became so convinced of this that he seized the property of the British traders at Rangoon, besides subjecting the persons of two of them to the greatest indignity.

The Government now acted with promptitude. The emperor was not only called on to compensate the merchants for their losses, apologise to the British crown, and pay a fine of one million rupees; but to bring home to this Buddhist potentate the dangers attaching to waking up the royal beast, we dispatched several war vessels to Rangoon and demanded its surrender. The Governor of that place, however, modelling his deportment upon that of his royal master grossly insulted out naval officers. Being deficient in artillery, we had to be content with blockading the port.

Without an instant's delay, an expedition was fitted out. The land forces consisted of 4,500 men of all ranks and were placed under the command of General Godwin, whose plans seemed to have been characterised by commendable foresight, for he at once proceeded to blockade the Irrawady. A prudent move this, for as Ava drew all its foodstuffs by way of this river, the pinch of hunger was soon felt.

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Drawn by] [*C. Lawson Wood.*

When some of the storming parties broke in a city gate some of the gunners fastened to the guns fainted.

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Then a night march gave us the town of Martaban. The enemy were permitted to see us start in the direction of Bassien and of course concluded that was our destination. At nightfall, the route was suddenly changed, and before Martaban could set its defence in order, our men were in the town beating down all opposition.

Admiral Austin, who commanded the fleet, then captured Bassien, which gave us command of the whole of the sea coast. The most brilliant achievement of this war, however, was the storming of Rangoon, especially noteworthy being the capture of the world-famed Golden Pagoda, a Buddhist temple held in the deepest veneration by the Burmese.

Standing in the middle of a plain, this towering edifice, 350ft. high, was visited yearly by over ten million pilgrims.

Its defences were of the most formidable description. A stockade lined with guns which surrounded the Pagoda, was of such enormous strength that even resident European merchants believed that it was impossible to capture.

In anticipation of hostilities, the government of Rangoon had further strengthened the Golden Pagoda by distributing twenty-five guns of large calibre in various parts of the building. To crown all, a wall fifteen feet high and twelve feet thick, had been built behind the stockade.

On the 12th April the H. E. I. Company's steamers and H. M. gunboats opened fire on the Golden Pagoda.

The greatest importance was attached to the capture of the Pagoda, as it was thought that its fall would convince every Buddhist in India of the hopelessness of opposing the British.

Although the Burmese had not forgotten the thrashing they had previously incurred at our hands, they had not the slightest anticipation of a fresh defeat, for was not the celebrated Burmese guard known as the "Immortals of the Golden Country," with them. How could they lose when the discipline of these redoubtable warriors compelled them to die at their posts?

To further equalise matters and to increase the courage of his other soldiers, the Burmese king had seized the wives of the married men and publicly announced that he should hold them as hostages for their husbands doing their duty. The single men were either chained by the artful monarch to the guns at the fort or tied to their married companions.

Long before our troops arrived we learnt how formidable were the preparations for our reception. But our men prepared to accomplish the task set before them with their usual dogged thoroughness. In fact, they were so little dismayed that to get what they call their hand in they first took the forts, rushing them one after the other in the coolest possible manner.

After the coast defences had all been blown up these indomitable fighters then turned their attention to Rangoon.

Whether it was the fierce cheering or the deadly rushes, the courage of the Burmese sank to so low an ebb that when one of the storming parties broke in a city gate some of the gunners fastened to the guns fainted. The rest of the garrison scampered out on the opposite side of the town and made straight for the Golden Pagoda, where by this time an enormous force had collected to prevent the ruins of their beloved Temple from being desecrated by the barbarian.

As soon as we arrived at the famous shrine we set about destroying the great wall in order to get at the force behind, but the *débris* was so great that but for a timely supply of scaling ladders we should never have succeeded in getting to the other side.

To drop from the summit of a lofty wall into the midst of dense masses of infuriated natives filled with the hope of killing, before they died, those sacrilegious dogs, the British, was not a pleasant prospect. But our men recked nothing of the danger. They mounted the wall and jumped into the seething mass below as if it were an ordinary every day occurrence. But once down they took good care to keep the enemy back till they were joined by more.

What the British cannot accomplish in war has yet to be discovered. At one time on that eventful day 20 of them kept 500 Burmese at bay. "The Immortals of the Golden Country," true to their traditions, fought when confronted by our red-coats and died at their posts; in fact the carnage was so dreadful that had not the Elder Brother of China been lulled into security by the flatteries of his wives he would have hastened to make peace.

After we had killed all the "Immortals of the Golden Country," the army, being supremely contented with itself, rested.

In the autumn of 1852 they started afresh, their next achievement being the capture of the city of Prome. This gave us the command of the river to the royal capital which had, for a long time, been on short commons on account of our blockade of the Irrawady.

Pegu was the next town that fell into our hands. The garrison evinced the greatest boldness till Mr. Atkins was seen to be marching steadily, not to say stolidly, on the city, when they fled. As the infatuated Emperor still refused to treat, and as the inhabitants of Ava were terribly afraid of their city being desecrated by the presence of a barbarian army, they deposed their ruler and placed his brother on the throne, and he at once proceeded to make terms with the conquerors.

On April 4th, 1853, the Burmese Commissioners and our representative met at Prome and concluded a treaty, the terms of which, it is safe to say, are already shaping the course of events in China. Lord Dalhousie must have been a statesman of the most extraordinary foresight, for his sole aim when drawing up the treaty seems to have been a desire to secure us against covetous designs the French might harbour in the future against Southern China.

Our representatives were instructed to insist on the cession of the whole of the coast line with Pegu and Martaban. The Burmese were aghast, Pegu alone comprised an area of 40,000 square miles and a population of three million persons. Sir Arthur Phayre gave the king forty-eight hours to consider, and next day held a review of the troops, the quality of our men so impressing the king that he agreed, providing he was allowed to cede the land by letter and not by treaty. This was agreed to, and peace was restored on June 30th, 1853.

We now held four provinces. In 1862 these were all welded into British Burmah. The existence of British Burmah has brought so much of the surrounding country within the sphere of British influence that when the increasing decay of France has weakened her Colonial policy there will be no competition to share with us free access to the richest districts of Southern China.

[Next Week: **The British Legion in Spain, 1835-1837.**]

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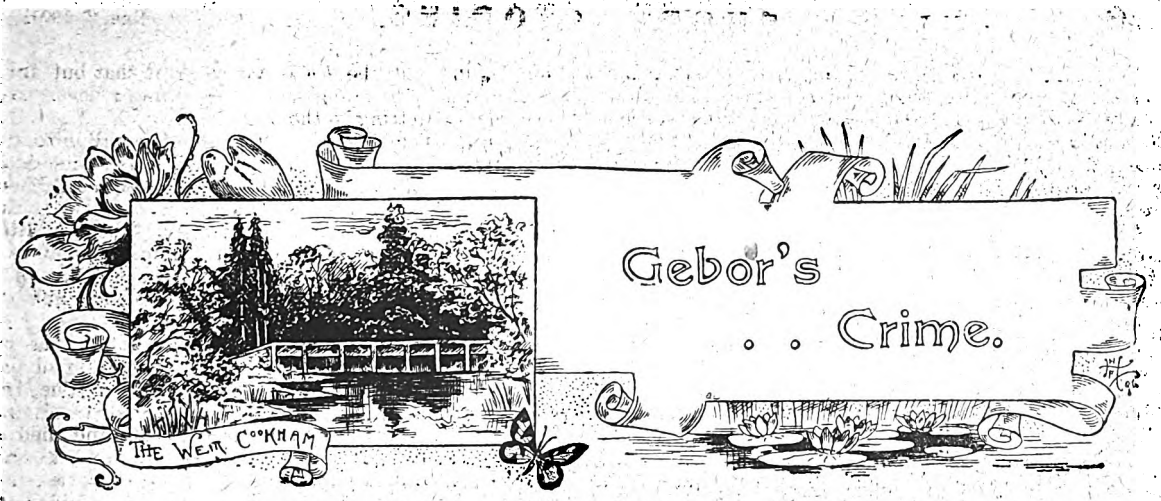

"I COULD kill him!"

The words were uttered in a fierce, hoarse whisper. The speaker was a short man, whose form indicated great strength; his countenance did not betoken any great intelligence, but gave evidence of a violent temper—a man who might be led into wrong-doing or crime out of sheer defiance or obstinacy, a man who regarded every little cross in life as an act expressly directed by fate against himself.

He was a Hungarian with a dash of Italian blood. He lived in a small village in the south of Austria, where he carried on the not very lucrative business of a shoemaker. He rented a small cottage from the chief man of the village, an individual whose character was by no means good and who seemed to be gifted with that peculiar quality which delights in making things hard for other people.

Nicolas Gebor, the shoe-maker, had suffered from this peculiarity of his landlord; it was not an easy task to make both ends meet, so Gebor was usually behind with his rent, and he never had any rest until it was paid. Gebor noticed, or fancied that he noticed, that his landlord seized every opportunity of making life harder for him—and everyone who knows anything of rural life, even in our own country, will understand what this means.

Gebor had a daughter, Minna, a girl of about nineteen, whose youthful affections had been set upon a promising young man of the same village—a young fellow who was working his way up steadily to the position of a small proprietor; but here again the hand of Nadar made itself felt. The promised husband of Minna found it impossible to realise his ambition, owing to the opposition of Nadar, and had to leave the village for another part of the country in order to try his luck.

But that was not quite all. Morai went away from his native village under a cloud; a robbery had been committed at the house of Nadar and Morai was accused of the crime. However, in spite of the influence of Nadar, the theft could not be proved against the young fellow; all the evidence that could be adduced amounted to little more than the fact that the stolen article had been missed immediately after a visit paid by Morai to Nadar on the subject of the farm which the former wished to acquire.

But Nadar's influence, although it could not secure the conviction, was sufficient to induce people to point the finger of scorn at both Morai and the shoe-maker's daughter. This was not a difficult task, for both the young people appeared to be above the ordinary run of the villagers, and small minded people usually resent that kind of thing; however much you may be above them in reality and however modest you may be, your natural difference excites their envy and malice.

As a matter of fact, Nadar had set his eye upon Minna and wanted her for himself, but this proposition had been rejected by Minna and her father with a unanimity that was surprising so far as Gebor himself was concerned, considering what a good match it would have been and how easily his own difficulties would have been smoothed away thereby.

Gebor was led to give utterance to the words just quoted by the desperate position in which he found himself. Morai had been driven from the village with a stain on his character, the stain of a charge that could be neither proved nor disproved; Gebor himself, having spent all he possessed and having pledged some of his goods and his credit, in order to provide for the defence of Morai, whose own savings had also been swallowed up, was unable to pay his rent and was threatened with eviction; while during the past day or two, a rumour had been circulated concerning Minna which had nearly driven the old man mad.

"It is all his doing! I could kill him!"

This time Gebor's words came more fiercely. He would probably have continued his audible mutterings had not a hand been placed on his shoulder and a voice said:

"Hush, father!"

Gebor turned with a start, his face distorted with rage and fear; he heaved a sigh of relief when he found that it was his daughter who confronted him. So deep had been his meditation that he had not recognised the voice or understood the words.

"Don't say such wicked things, father!" cried Minna, clasping her hands and looking appealingly at him. "You make me frightened. It will all come right some day, God will see that everything is made clear."

"Yes, yes, yes!" muttered the old man in a shame-faced manner, avoiding her gaze. "Don't take any notice of what I say, Minna, it's only my—joking."

"Then don't joke any more like that, father, but come and have some dinner," said the girl, trying to assume a bright aspect in order to cheer her father. "It isn't much, but it tastes very nice and it will do you good. Come along!" And, taking him by the arm, she led him into the little kitchen where the poor repast was ready.

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Gebor was silent during the first part of the meal, but became more cheerful, apparently, towards the finish. But he did not eat much and retired to his little workshop as soon as he could.

There was no work for him to do just then and this gave him another opportunity of following the unpleasant train of thought which had been interrupted by his daughter.

Why should this man have it in his power to do so much mischief? Why should any man have such power? Nations had from time to time thrown off the yoke of the one who was ruling them with too severe a hand, and this as often as regarded as a meritorious action and as patriotism; the people of a country submitted to such a yoke only so long as they were too weak to strike a blow against it. Was it not just to say that what was good for a whole nation was good for one village also? Would not their own village be better if Nadar were removed? It was not possible to depose this man as a king would be deposed, but—in some countries the ruler had paid for his misdeeds with his life! With his life!

The words seemed to sink into the mind of Gebor and to haunt him. He could not get rid of them; he saw them in letters of fire all round his workshop, no matter which way he looked, and as the darkness came on, so they shone more brightly.

Was it wicked to rid the world of such a monster? Surely not. It was not right that this man should make life miserable for everyone else; he could not believe that to rid the world of Nadar would be to incur the penalty meted out to ordinary criminals who took life in order to rob. No, no! Such an act as that which something was now whispering to him to commit was a different thing entirely, a justifiable deed.

He brooded over this until darkness enveloped him. He had a vague idea that his daughter had looked in during the afternoon to remind him that she was going to the next village on an errand—to take home some work which she had been doing—and that she would not be home till late; she had said something about his not forgetting his tea. But Gebor had not thought of tea; he had thought of nothing except Nadar.

Then there seemed to be a blank, and after this interval his thoughts became active again and stirred him to deeds. Suppose he killed Nadar? How quiet it was! His cottage was in a lonely part—suppose Nadar were to call on him and badger him for the rent, as he had done before, just out of pure devilment? No one would know; the hated landlord would disappear!

Again there was a blank, and then a knock at the door. Before Gebor could rise to open it, the head and shoulders of Nadar appeared.

"Remember, if I don't have it by to-morrow mid-day, out you go—you and that daughter of yours and all your sticks!"

Gebor restrained his rising anger and asked Nadar to come in.

"I have a word to say to you, respected sir," he explained in his humblest tones. "It is about the rent. Come in and shut the door, it is cold outside."

There was just enough light from the moon to enable the two men to see each other dimly. Nadar came in and shut the door.

"Sitting without a light so as to save your money to pay me, eh?" asked Nadar with a sneer. "What is it? Be quick, for I have no time to waste!"

Gebor approached him with a deferential attitude, but Nadar waved him back.

"Get a light. I don't care to stand in this infernal place without a lamp. Be quick or I won't wait. Do ——"

That was his last word, for Gebor sprang at him and gripped him by the throat. Without a sound Nadar went down with a crash, Gebor still digging his fingers into the throat of the tyrant, the man who had injured him so deeply. Nadar struggled strongly, but he was no match for his opponent, who held him until the struggling ceased. The deed was done and the village was free of the oppressor.

Gebor rose and lighted a candle. He was full of exultation; he would not be turned out of his home, for some time must elapse before anything could be done by the heir, whoever he might be, and that would give Gebor a chance of raking the money together. How everyone would rejoice!

He bent over the body and surveyed the face by the light of his candle; then there came a gradual change of feeling and exultation began to give place to remorse and fear.

What right had he to usurp the functions of the law or the prerogative of the Almighty? All the glamour that had filled him when thinking of national rebellions had now disappeared, and he saw his crime in its true light. He was a murderer, one who had taken life to evade the payment of a just debt. It was a just debt, for he owed the money and admitted the fact, and although his landlord had threatened him with harsh treatment, yet that was no excuse for so horrible a crime.

Two blacks do not make a white; hard dealing on the part of Nadar was by no means a sufficient reason for the committal of a murder.

Now Gebor began to realise the full consequences of what he had done.

"They will drag me away to prison and hang me!" he muttered, clenching his hands in terror. "Minna will be laughed at, she will be pointed at as the daughter of a murderer. Minna's heart will be broken when she learns that her father, whom she loves so dearly, is to go to the gallows! My dead wife is looking down upon me from above with horror. I can never expect that, or the punishment that will come hereafter, but—yes, yes!—there may be a chance of escaping the hangman and avoiding the disgrace for Minna. I must hide the body; I must get rid of it at once. I must carry it far away from here, so as to avoid suspicion. The gallows! I can feel—No, no! Anything but that; I cannot go through that!"

His voice rose to a shriek with the last word; his whole body trembled with fear so that he could scarcely keep upright.

Every time the window shook as the wind blew against it, Gebor started and uttered a cry of terror. He stood in the middle of the room and dared not make a step in any direction lest he should find himself in the grasp of someone who had come to denounce him, and hand him over to the representatives of justice.

He knew that he must act promptly in order to hide what he had done, yet he had not the strength to move. Although he tried to keep his eyes averted from the ghastly thing that lay on the floor, he was obliged to look at it; the distorted face seemed to be still alive, and to be leering at him.

His eyes were riveted to that face until his agony of terror nearly overturned his reason; with a cry more like that of a savage beast than of a human being, he at last made a desperate plunge at the body, lifted it in

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his strong arms, threw it across his shoulder and staggered with his burden into the open.

He must take it away without being seen—anywhere, anywhere! His strength came back to him now that he was outside, for he understood that he might be seen and that in order to avoid such a catastrophe he must be quick to fulfil his mission.

He hurried along almost at a run, taxing his strength to the utmost, until his breath came thick and fast and the perspiration stood on his forehead in spite of the keen cold air of the autumn night. On, on! he could not go fast enough to outstrip his own fears; at frequent intervals he looked back to make sure he was not being followed, but although he could see nothing, he was not convinced.

He chose the loneliest paths leading to the open country, but he started and occasionally almost stumbled at the ordinary night sounds. At last, quite exhausted, he reached a stream and into the calm water he threw his burden.

He was home again without being seen and just a few minutes before his daughter returned. She reproached him gently for not having had his tea, and prepared a supper for him, of which he ate but little, and did not enjoy in the least.

The next morning there was a sensation in the village, for Nadar had vanished—gone without leaving a trace behind him. All that was known was that he had set out in the afternoon for a walk across country—a favourite form of recreation with him—and had not been seen since. Inquiries were made, and it was discovered that he had left the town eight miles off, in order to return home, just after nightfall. But all else remained shrouded in mystery.

Gebor's idea, that he would be allowed to rest in peace, was not realised; the order had been given by Nadar, and as the money was not forthcoming, the shoemaker and his daughter were turned out. They succeeded in getting one of the villagers to take them in for the time, while their few belongings were stored in the yard. So far as he was concerned, therefore, Gebor's crime was no benefit.

But this failure had scarcely any effect upon him, he was too absorbed by the fear of detection, and by remorse. Nadar haunted him not only in his waking hours, but also in his sleep. He scarcely dared go out by himself; he insisted on his daughter accompanying him. He dreamt that awful scene over and over again, starting up in his sleep with a shriek as he fancied that the face of Nadar, with that leer upon it, was looking at him from the end of his bed.

Everywhere he saw that dread object which he had carried from his workshop to the stream; whenever he passed by a ditch or any hollow place that figure appeared to bob into sight and point an accusing finger at him.

He grew pale and thin; he wasted at an incredibly fast rate, and he himself recognised that he could not live long under such conditions. Truly, the vengeance of Heaven was overtaking him.

Three days after, there came the intelligence which he had expected—Nadar's body was discovered, half on the banks and half in the stream. Nadar had risen from the grave, so to speak, in order to accuse him. And on the body, so the report ran, was found something that must lead to the detection of the murderer.

"My time has come!" exclaimed Gebor to himself when this rumour reached him. "In an hour or two they will be here to drag me to prison and to the gallows! I cannot face it; I cannot face my daughter's grief and her abhorrence! I must kill myself before they come!"

He looked about the little room which had been set apart for the accommodation of himself and his daughter; there was a beam and he might hang himself. He recognised that it was a just punishment; it was the death he had dealt out to his victim. Even as he looked at the beam he heard footsteps coming up the rickety stairs—they were coming for him! He glared about him like a wild beast seeking a way of escape; there was no time to carry out his intention of destroying himself.

He hastened to the little window and threw it open. If he could drop to the ground he might evade the officers of the law for just long enough to check them. He knelt upon the sill, but a hand grasped him and shook him. He screamed in his terror, then——

"Father, what is the matter?" He heard the voice of his daughter as though from a long distance. "What ails you? You have fallen asleep, and had a bad dream, is that it? Poor dear, I ought not to have left you, but I am back now, and we will have supper. I see you have had no tea."

"Nadar?" gasped the shoemaker, clutching his daughter. "Tell me, is he alive? I thought—Oh, thank Heaven it is not real!" and he sank back again on his stool and wept like a child.

Minna wanted to know all about it, and when her father had thoroughly realized that he had fallen asleep while brooding over his misfortunes and wrongs, and that this awful experience was but a dream, he told her briefly what he had gone through.

"I am glad for your sake, dear father," said Minna with tears in her eyes, "that Heaven has been pleased to teach you this lesson in such a way. I have been afraid for you, I dreaded that you might do something for which we should all be sorry, and ever since I heard you utter those wicked words this morning I have been uneasy. We are in great trouble, but a wicked action of any kind will not help us—sooner or later we shall suffer for it. We must bear our troubles bravely, and all will be well one day."

It is not an uncommon experience in life that light comes just when we are giving up hope that the darkness will ever vanish, and thus it was with Gebor.

On the following day the villagers heard that Nadar was ill. Gebor was left undisturbed in his little home for several weeks, as his landlord's illness proved to be of such a serious nature that his life was despaired of for a time, and he was kept to his bed and his room for more than two months. Work came in more briskly to the old shoemaker, while Minna and the banished Moria were able to earn and save a little, thus it happened that the rent was ready when Nadar was sufficiently recovered to make applications for it. But to the surprise of Gebor, he was sent for by Nadar and his money returned to him.

"Gebor, I have been to the very gate of death, and when a man is face to face with death his opinions undergo a change," said Nadar gravely, not noticing that Gebor shivered. "I have not dealt fairly by you and yours; let me make it up to you now. You may tell it where you please that I have wronged you, and that I have found the missing article which Morai was thought to have stolen. Tell him to come back and he shall have a farm as a present from me!"

Gebor stammered a few words of thanks, then fell on his knees and raised a prayer to Heaven that he himself had been saved from a great sin.

GEORGE DAY.

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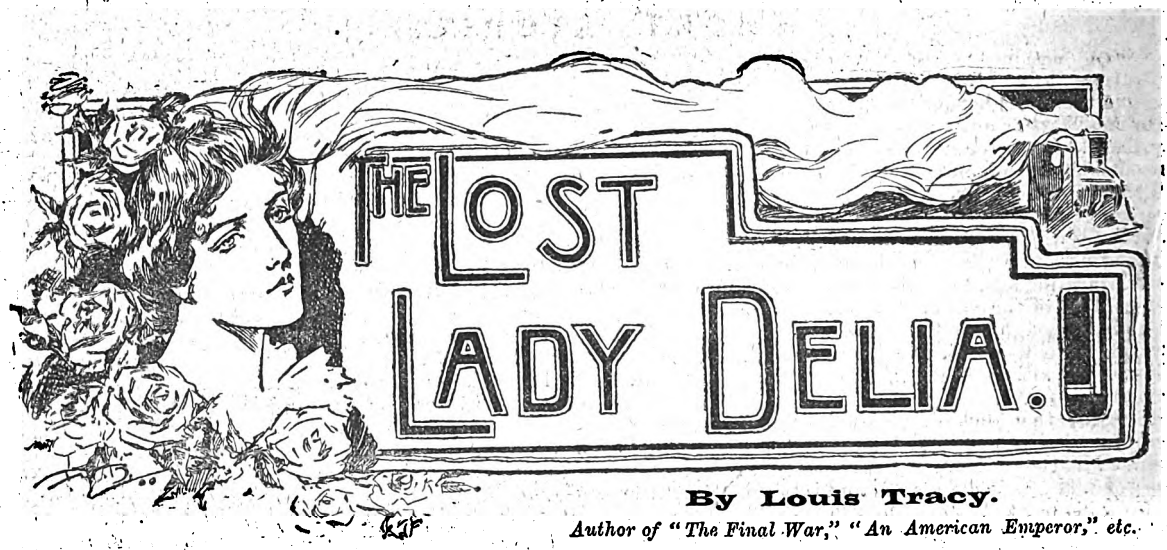

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

READ THIS BEFORE YOU BEGIN.

LADY DELIA LYLE leaves her house one foggy November afternoon, saying she is going to see her sister at Richmond, but from that time she is not heard of.

Her husband, Sir Charles Lyle, puts the matter into the hands of detectives, Inspector Winter taking charge of the case.

Reginald Brett, a barrister friend of the Lyles, also promises to do all he can, and he finds out that Lady Delia, on the night of her disappearance, instead of going to Richmond, alighted at Sloane Square, and went to a block of flats called Raleigh Mansions.

Towards the end of the month the body of a woman, evidently murdered, is found wedged beneath a drain-pipe in the Thames at Putney, and, though Sir Charles does not identify the body, Brett imagines it to be that of Lady Delia. Shortly after this discovery Lady Delia's maid, Jane Harding, disappears. She is afterwards found to have gone on the stage.

Brett now starts investigations at Raleigh Mansions, and he fixes on two residents there as being likely to have been connected with Lady Delia. These are a Mr. Sydney H. Pyne, who is not at present in residence, and a Mrs. Hillmer, whom he finds to be Pyne's sister.

It had transpired that Pyne had gone to Monte Carlo, and thither Brett goes, and he discovers that though letters are addressed to Pyne at the Hotel du Cercle, he is not known there.

During his stay at Monte Carlo Brett becomes acquainted with an Englishman, named Albert Mensmore, whom he helps out of some money difficulties, but he does not discover anything about Pyne.

After his return Brett finds out that Sir Charles Lyle knows Albert Mensmore, but in what connection does not transpire.

A few days later Brett goes into the City, to the office of Dodge and Co., with whom he had had some speculative dealings, and from remarks made by Mr. Dodge, he thinks that Pyne and Mensmore must be one and the same man. In the evening Brett and Winter go to Raleigh Mansions and search the flat occupied by Pyne. Brett finds that a piece of one of the fire-dogs is missing, and that it exactly corresponds with the piece of iron which was found imbedded in the head of the body found at Putney.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. HILLMER HESITATES.

"I WONDER if I shall have such exciting times to-day as I had yesterday," said Brett to himself, as he unfolded his *Times* next morning at breakfast.

Affairs had so jumbled themselves together in his brain the previous evening that he had abandoned all effort to elucidate them. He retired to rest earlier than usual, to sleep soundly, save for a vivid dream in which he was being tried for his life, the chief witnesses against him being Mrs. Hillmer, Phyllis Browne, and Jane Harding, the latter varying her evidence by entertaining the Court with a song and dance.

The weather, too, had improved. It was clear, frosty, and sunlit—one of those delightful days of winter that serve as cheerful remembrances during periods of seemingly interminable fog overhead and slush beneath.

During a quiet meal he read the news, and, with the invaluable morning smoke, settled himself cosily into an armchair to consider procedure.

In the first place, he carefully weighed those utterances of Mensmore at Monte Carlo, which he could recall, and which seemed, by the light of later knowledge, to bear upon the case.

Mensmore had alluded to "family troubles," to "worries," and "anxieties," that practically drove him from England. Some of these, no doubt, referred to the Springbok speculation. Others, again, might have meant Mrs. Hillmer or some presently unknown relative. But in Mensmore's manner there was nothing that savoured of greater secrecy than the natural reticence a gentleman has in discussing domestic affairs with a stranger.

This man had practically been snatched from death. At such a moment it was inconceivable that he could cloak the remorse of a murderer by the simulation of more honourable motives, in themselves sufficiently distressing to cause him to deliberately choose suicide as the best way of ending his difficulties.

The policeman had summarised the testimony against Pyne as insufficient to curtail the remarkable powers of endurance of a cat. But to Brett the case against Mensmore, alias Pyne, stood in clearer outline. Now that he could calmly reason the matter he felt that the balance of probabilities swung away from the hypothesis that Mensmore was the actual slayer of Lady Delia, and towards the theory that he was in some way bound up with her death, whether knowingly or unknowingly it was at present impossible to say.

The new terror to Brett was Mr. Winter.

"Why, if that animated truncheon knew all that I know of this business he would arrest Mensmore forthwith! If he did, what would result? A scandal, a thorough exposure, possibly the ruin of Mensmore's love-making if he be an innocent man. That must be stopped. But how? Without forewarning Mensmore himself—and he may be guilty. Chance may favour Winter, as it favoured me, in disclosing the identity of the missing Pyne. And what of the *real* Pyne? What on earth has *he* got to do with it, and why has Mensmore taken his name? If ever I get to the bottom of this business I may well congratulate myself. The sole result of all my labour thus far may be summed up in a sentence—I have not yet come face to face with the man whom I can honestly suspect as Lady Delia's murderer. Not much, my boy!"

Reggie uttered the last sentence aloud, startling Smith, who was clearing the table.

"Beg pardon, sir," cried Smith.

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"Oh, nothing. I was only expressing an opinion."

"I thought, perhaps, sir, you was thinkin' of Mr. Winter."

"What of him?"

"Your remark, sir, hexactly hexpresses my hopinion of 'im."

Smith was not a badly educated man, but the least excitement produced an appalling derangement of the letter "h" in his vocabulary.

"Mr. Winter is all right in his own way, Smith."

"Maybe, but why should he come pokin' round 'ere pryin' into your little affairs, deecur?"

"My what?"

"Sorry, sir, but that's what a French maid I once knew called 'em. Flirtations, sir. Mashes."

"Smith, have you been drinking?"

"Me, sir?"

"Well, explain yourself. I never flirted with a woman in my life."

"That's what I told 'im, sir. 'My master's a regular saint,' says I, 'a sort of middle-aged ankyrite.' But Mr. Winter 'e wouldn't 'ave it at no price. 'Come now, Smith,' says 'e, 'your guv'nor's pretty deep. 'E's a toff, 'e is, an' knows lots of lydies—titled lydies.' 'Very like,' says I, 'but 'e doesn't mash 'em.' 'Then what price that lydy who called for 'im in a keb afore 'e went away? An' who's 'e gone to Monte Carlo with?' This was during your habsence, sir."

"Go on, Smith. Anything else?"

"Well, sir, that rather flung me out of my stride, as the sayin' is, as I 'ad seen the lydy in question. An' Mr. Winter 'as a nasty way of putting you on your oath, so to speak. But I never owned up."

Brett laughed.

"Excellent. Mr. Winter has a keen nose for false scents. I have already told him to leave my affairs alone. He means no harm."

"Not much, my boy!" Reggie uttered the last sentence aloud, startling Smith, who was clearing the table.

But the reference to a "lydy in a keb" had suggested an immediate plan of action to the barrister. He would call and see Mrs. Hillmer. He wrote a note asking her if he might come to tea that afternoon, and sent it by a boy messenger.

In return he received this answer:

"Mrs. Hillmer will be at home at four o'clock if Mr. Brett cares to call then."

"Phew!" whistled Reggie. "What's in the wind there? This is an uncommonly stiff invitation. That rascal Winter has upset her, I'll be bound. I *must* choke him off somehow. Suppose he were to find that damaged bracket! He would have Mensmore under trial at the Old Bailey in double-quick time. After I leave Mrs. Hillmer I must visit No. 12 again and carry off the pair of brackets before Winter discovers them, as he will haunt the place in future."

Brett had a set of skeleton keys in his possession.

They were in his pocket when he approached Raleigh Mansions at the appointed hour.

The same trim maid opened the door for him and ushered him into the drawing-room. On the occasion of his first visit he was taken to the dining-room. It was a small matter, but Brett paid heed to such.

Mrs. Hillmer appeared, very stately and undemonstrative. She greeted Brett coldly, seated herself at a distance, and said, in a cold, well-controlled voice:—

"I did not expect the honour of another visit from you, Mr. Brett."

"Why not?" There was a fight brewing, and he would let the enemy open fire, for the glitter in her eyes showed that the batteries were ready to be unmasked. He was not mistaken.

"Why not? Because I believed you to be a gentleman. Once you had stooped to sending your myrmidons to pester me I imagined that you would yourself keep in the background."

There was an indignant ring in her words as she concluded. When a woman is angry her own speech acts as a trumpet-call and fires her blood. Mrs. Hillmer began, as she intended, in icy disdain. She ended in tremulous anger.

"You allude to Mr. Winter," said the barrister, looking steadily at her.

"Yes, that is the man. Some hireling from Scotland Yard. How *could* you so meanly induce my confidence at our first meeting? I have never been so deceived in a man in my life, and I have had a surfeit of bitter experience already."

"Brother and sister are alike. They have led queer lives," mused Brett. Aloud he said:

"Your experience, Mrs. Hillmer, should at least lead you not to condemn any one unheard. May I explain that which is to you incomprehensible at this moment?—justly so, I must admit."

"Explanations! I am a child in the hands of such as you. How can I hope to fathom your real intent? Pre-

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sumably, if I accept your apologies now, it will be a prelude to further visits by impudent police officers."

"I am not here to apologise, Mrs. Hilmer."

"What then, pray?"

"To plead with you. For Heaven's sake do not distrust *me*. It may ruin those whom you hold dear. Listen to me first, and try to believe me afterwards."

Brett was so thoroughly in earnest, so impressive in manner, that the other did not know what to make of him. In her despair she adopted a woman's chief resource—her eyes filled with tears.

But Brett anticipated her. "Now, Mrs. Hillmer," he cried, "let us act like sensible people. Compose yourself, order in some tea, and after an interlude I will tell you all about it. Candour is an indispensable element of confidence."

Mrs. Hillmer rose, made an effort to choke back her agitation, went out, and called to the maid for tea. She returned in a few moments. When they were alone Brett said, with a smile:

"A little *poudre de riz* is an excellent corrective for signs of grief."

The lady blushed, and there was a perceptible return to her former peasant manner.

"You are incorrigible, I fear, Mr. Brett," she cried.

"Now, Mrr. Hillmer," he began; but she broke in vehemently, running to him and clutching him by the arm.

"Not a bit. Impressionable, rather. Now, I am going to startle you considerably, so be prepared. And do not jump at conclusions. Though startling, my news is not alarming. All may yet end well."

Mrs. Hillmer was manifestly anxious, but she promised to try and understand him fully before she formed any judgment.

"Then," said Brett, "I can clear the air a good deal by a simple statement. Mr. Winter is no agent of mine, and I have seen your brother, Albert Mensmore, at Monte Carlo."

Mrs. Hillmer gave a little gasp of surprise. "You have seen Bertie?"

"Yes; your brother, is he not?"

"My half-brother, to be exact. My father was married twice. I—I am the elder of the two by four years."

"Apart from the compliment, you do not look it. But what you say explains the almost total absence of likeness between you."

"Possibly. People said we each resembled our mother. And Bertie, you know, has led a somewhat adventurous career. He roughed it a good deal in America. But what has all this got to do with detectives, and recent inquiries, and that sort of thing?"

"Much. The last time we met I told you that your brother was mixed up in some affair with a lady."

Mrs. Hillmer laughed, a trifle constrainedly. "If you knew Bertie as well as I do, you would not harbour suspicions concerning him. He never had a love affair in his life. Indeed, he is something of a woman-hater."

"No doubt he was. But he has changed his opinions. He is in love, and is engaged to be married to a very charming girl. So far, his beliefs and his good fortune have pulled against each other."

"Bertie engaged to be married! Good gracious! Who is she? And how can he support a wife? He is poor, and in debt, and he won't even let me help him."

"I have stated the facts, nevertheless. The lady is a daughter of Sir William Browne, and they are now yachting with a large party in the Mediterranean."

"Are her people against the match? Is that why this Scotland Yard man——?"

"No. Mensmore is on board Sir William's yacht. But there is another lady, who is missing from her home for nearly three months, who is believed to be dead—murdered, the police say—and with whom your brother was in some indefinable way associated."

"Do they dare to say that Bertie killed her?" Mrs. Hillmer's colour rose and her eyes flashed fire again.

"They say nothing. They are simply doing their duty in trying to discover the truth. And you may take it from me, as an undoubted fact, that the last place this lady visited before her death was one of the flats in these mansions. All present indications point to your brother's residence as being that place. Now, I pray you, be calm, and try to help me, for I have acted in this matter as your friend and as your brother's friend. At this very moment I am concealing his identity and his whereabouts from the police, who are searching for him under his assumed name of Pyne. If he is guilty of this crime, then I must hand him over to justice, for the murdered woman was a dear

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and good friend of mine. If he is innocent, as, indeed, I believe him to be, I will strive to help him and save his good name from the tarnish of being arrested on such an odious charge."

During this recital Mrs. Hillmer became deathly pale. Her agitation was the greater inasmuch as she forcibly controlled herself. But she could not remain seated. She sprang to the window and looked out, in the vain effort to seek inspiration from the gathering gloom of the street. Then she turned, and spoke very slowly:

"I think I understand. I must have faith in you, Mr. Brett. Who—was—the lady?"

The barrister thought deeply before replying. He had previously decided upon this supreme step, but he hesitated now that it was imminent. There was no help for it.

"Her name," he said, "is one which is well known to the world. Lady Delia Lyle, wife of Sir Charles Lyle, is missing from her home since the evening of Nov. 6 last. She met with a violent death that night, and I—not the police—have good reason to believe that she was killed in your brother's residence."

Mrs. Hillmer flung herself on a lounge, buried her white face in her hands and moaned, in a perfect agony of terror: "Oh, my God; what shall I do? What shall I do?"

This outburst astounded Brett. He did not know what to make of it. His intelligence had certainly taken his hearer completely by surprise. What interpretation was he to place upon her words and her unrestrained actions?

Two or three assailants flung themselves upon him.

"Now, Mrs. Hillmer," he began; but she broke in vehemently, running to him and clutching him by the arm:

"He is innocent, Mr. Brett. He *must* be innocent. He could not lift his hand to any woman. You must save him—do you hear?—save him, or you will have his blood on your soul. It *was* true, then, that you came here to hunt for him. Save him, if you hope for mercy yourself when you are dying."

In her passion she shook him violently, and for an instant they looked intently at each other—the woman eager, entreating; the man amazed and questioning.

"Do you not see," Reggie said at last, "that your vehemence reveals your thoughts? For anything that you know to the contrary, your brother may have committed this crime. Nay, it requires but slight knowledge of human nature to read your suspicion lest it be true. At this moment I am convinced that you are, in your heart, less sceptical than I of his guilt."

Mrs. Hillmer flung herself again upon the lounge, silent, tearful, torn with violent emotion, which she vainly endeavoured to suppress.

Brett tried to reason with her. "It will, perhaps, serve to clear up a mystery that deepens each moment if you place your trust in me," he said. "Tell me fully and openly any cause you may have for fearing that your brother is implicated in this terrible business. I ask you to adopt this course in all good faith. I have seen your brother under most trying circumstances; I have been with him at an hour when it would be impossible for him to conceal his burden if the weight of Lady Delia's death lay upon him. Yet I think him innocent. I think that chance has contributed to gather evidence against him. If I can learn even a portion of the truth it will enable me to quickly dispel the barrier of uncertainty that now hinders progress."

"What is it you want to know?" Mrs. Hillmer's voice was hollow and broken. The barrister was shocked at the effect of his revelation, but he was forced to go on with the disagreeable task he had undertaken.

"Do you mean," he said, "that you will answer my questions?"

"So far as I can."

"Would it not be better to tell me in your own words what you have to say?"

Mrs. Hillmer looked up, and the agony in her face filled him with keen pity.

"Oh, Heaven help me to do what is right!" she cried.

"Your prayer will surely be answered. I am certain of that. A great wrong has been committed by some one, and the innocent must not suffer to shield the guilty."

Mrs. Hillmer bowed her head and did not utter a word for some minutes. She appeared to be reasoning out some plan of action in a dazed fashion. When decision came she said in low tones:

"You must leave me now, Mr. Brett. I must have time. When I am ready I shall send for you."

Brett instinctively knew that it was hopeless to plead with her. Frivolous, volatile women of her stamp often betray unusual strength of character at a supreme crisis.

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"You are adopting an unwise course," he said sadly.

"Maybe. But I must go alone. I am not deceiving you. When I have determined something which is not now clear to me, I will send for you. It may be that I shall speak. It may be that I shall be silent. In either case I only can judge—and suffer."

"Tell me one thing at least, Mrs. Hillmer, before we part. Did you know of Lady Delia's death before to-day?"

She came to him again, looked him straight in the face, and said: "I did not. On my soul, I did not."

Then Brett passed into the hall; and even the shock of this painful interview did not prevent him from noting the flitting of a shadow past a distant doorway, as some one hurried into the interior of a room

In their excitement they forgot that their voices might attract attention, and lady's maids are proverbially inquisitive.

CHAPTER XVI.

Foxey.

The keen, cold air of the streets soon restored Reggie to his habitual calm. He felt that a quiet stroll would do him good.

As he walked he pondered, and the more critically he examined Mrs. Hillmer's change of attitude the less he understood it.

"For some ridiculous reason," he communed, "the woman believes her brother guilty. Now I shall have endless trouble at getting at the truth. She will not be candid. She will only tell me that which she thinks will help him, and conceal that which she considers damaging. That is a woman's way all the world over. And a desperately annoying way it is. Perhaps I was to blame in springing this business too hastily upon her. But there! I like Mrs. Hillmer, and I hate using her as one juggles with a self-conceited witness. In future I will trouble her no more."

A casual glance into the interior of Sloane-square Station gave him a glimpse of the barrier, and he recognised the collector who had taken Lady Delia's ticket on that fatal night when she quitted the Richmond train.

Rather as a relief than for other cause Brett entered into conversation with the man:

"Do you remember me?" he said.

"Can't say as I do, sir." The man examined his questioner with quick suspicion. The forgotten "season" dodge would not work with *him*.

"Maybe you remember these?" said Brett, producing his cigar case.

"Now, wot's the gyme?" said the collector to himself. But he smiled, and answered: "Do you mean by the look of 'em, sir?"

"Good," laughed Brett. "Take three or four home with you. Meanwhile, I am sure you remember me coming to see you last November concerning a lady who alighted here from Victoria one foggy evening and handed you a ticket to Richmond?"

"Of course I does, sir. And the cigars are *all* right. There was a lot of fuss about that lydy. Did she ever turn up?"

"Not exactly. That is to say, she died shortly after you saw her."

"No! Well, of all the rummy goes! She was a fine looking woman, too, as well as I rec'llect. Looked fit for another fifty year. Wot 'appened to her?"

"I don't know. I wish I did."

"An' 'ave you been on the hunt ever since, gov'nor?"

"Yes, ever since."

"She's dead, you s'y?"

"Yes."

"But 'ow d'you know she's dead, if you ain't seen her since?"

"I have seen her. I saw her dead body at Putney."

"At Putney! Well, I'm blowed!"

A roar from beneath, the slamming of many doors, and the quick rush of a crowd up the steps, announced the arrival of a train. "Pardon, sir," said the man, "this is the 5.41 Mansion House. But don't go aw'y. There's somethin'—Tickets, if you please."

In a minute the collector had ended his task. While sorting his bundle of pasteboards he said:—

"Nobody ever tell'd me that before. An' you ain't the only one on her track. Are you in the police?"

"No."

"I thought not. But some other chaps who kem 'ere was. None of 'em ever said the lydy was dead."

"Why; what matter?"

"Oh, nothin', but two heads is better'n one, if they're only sheep's heads."

"Undoubtedly. The rule is all the more reliable when one of them belongs to a shrewd chap like you."

The collector grinned. He understood that he was being flattered for a purpose, yet he liked it.

"That's one w'y of lookin' at it," he said; "but if this affair's pertickler, why, all I can s'y is it's worth somethin' to somebody."

"Certainly. Here's a sovereign for a start. If you can tell me anything really worth knowing I will add four more to it."

"Now, that's talkin'. I'm off duty at eight o'clock, an' I can't have a chat now because I expect the inspector any moment."

"Suppose you call and see me in Victoria Street at nine?"

"Right you are, sir."

Brett gave the man his address and recrossed the square. No one was about, so he walked straight to the first door of Raleigh Mansions and made his way to the fourth floor.

Had he been a moment later he must have seen Mrs. Hillmer, closely wrapped up, leave her residence unattended. Her carriage was not in waiting. She walked to the cabstand in the square and called a hansom, driving back up Sloane-street.

Her actions indicated a desire to be unobserved even by her servants, as in the usual course of events the housemaid would have brought a cab to the door.

But the barrister, steadily climbing up the stairs, could not guess what was happening in the street.

He soon opened Mensmore's door, and noted, as an idle fact, that the expected gust of cold air was absent.

There was no light on this landing, so he was in pitch darkness once he had passed the doorway. There was no need to strike a match, however, as he remembered the exact position of the electric switch-board—on the left beyond the dining-room door.

He stepped cautiously forward, put out his hand to grope for the lever; but, with a quick rush, some two or three assailants flung themselves upon him, and after a fierce, gasping struggle—for Brett was a strong man—he was borne to the ground face downwards, with one arm beneath him, and the other pinioned behind his back.

"Look sharp, Jim," shouted a breathless voice. "Turn on the light and close the door. We've got him safe enough."

They had. Two large hands closed round his neck, a knee was firmly embedded in the small of his back, another hand gripped his left wrist like a vice, whilst some one sat on his legs.

Brett could not have been collared more effectually by a Rugby International team.

The third man found the electric light and turned it on.

"Now, get up," said some one to Brett, "and don't give us any more trouble. It's no use."

The barrister, who had had his wind knocked out of him, rose to his knees. Then, as the light fell upon the horrified face of Mr. Winter, he vainly essayed to keep up the pretence of indignation. Once fairly on his feet again he nearly collapsed with laughter. He leaned against the

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wall and, as his breath came again, he laughed until his sides ached.

Meanwhile the detective was crimson with rage and annoyance. His two assistants did not know what to make of the affair.

"What's wrong, Jim?" said one at last. "Isn't this Pyne?"

"No; of course it's not," was his angry growl.

"Then who the —— is it?"

"Oh, ask me another! How on earth could I guess, Mr. Brett, that you'd come letting yourself in here with a latchkey?"

Reggie was still holding his sore ribs and could not answer; but the policeman who had questioned Winter caught the name. He knew it, and grinned at his companion.

"What did you want here, anyhow?" snarled the infuriated Winter, as he realised that his great *coup* would be retailed with embellishments through every police station in the metropolis.

"I w-wanted you to ar-r-rest me, W-Winter," roared Reggie. "I s-said you would, and you have."

"Confound it, how could you know I was here?"

"You were sure to wait here for a man who probably will not return for months."

"Was I, indeed? Well, you have got yourself to blame if you have been hurt. I hope these gentlemen did not treat you too badly?"

"What?" cried one who had not yet spoken. "He gave me such a punch in the bread-basket that I've only just recovered my speech."

"I think we're about quits," said the other, surveying a torn waistcoat and broken watch-chain.

"I shall be black and blue all over to-morrow," said Brett; "but if you are satisfied I am. Come, Mr. Winter, bring your friends and we will open a bottle of wine. We all want it. Pyne won't be here to-night. Just now he is in Wyoming."

"How do you know?"

"By intuition. I am seldom mistaken."

"But why didn't you call out just now when you came in?"

"I hadn't a chance. You were on me like a thousand of bricks. I must confess that if Pyne had been in my shoes he would be a doomed man."

Winter did not know whether to believe Brett or not. He was genuinely angry at the incident, but the barrister did not want to convert him into an enemy, as he vaguely felt that a catastrophe was imminent, and a false move by the police might do irretrievable mischief.

"Well, Winter," he said, "I must confess that this time you have got the better of me. I did *not* know you were here. I looked in for the purpose of quietly studying the ground, as it were, and I was never more taken by surprise in my life. Moreover, your plan was a very clever one in view of the fact that Pyne might return at any moment."

The detective became a little more amiable at this praise from the famous amateur, for Brett's achievements were well known to his two colleagues.

"I suppose you wondered what had happened," he said with a smile.

"I thought my last hour had come. I am only sorry that Pyne himself did not have the experience."

"Do you really believe he is in the States, sir?"

"I am sure of it."

"Then he must have returned there since he wrote that letter."

"That is the only solution of the difficulty."

"Hum. It's a pity."

"Why?"

"I would sooner have arrested him on this side. To get him by extradition is a slow affair, and probably means a winter trip across the Atlantic for me."

"It means a Winter trip for you at any time of the year, Jim," laughed one of his companions.

Good humour being now restored, the party quitted the flat and adjourned to a neighbouring hotel, where the barrister started Winter on the full, true, and particular account of his pursuit and capture of the Winchmore Hill burglars.

At the end of a bottle of champagne and a cigar they all parted excellent friends, but Brett did not attempt to revisit No. 12, Raleigh Mansions, that night.

Instead, he partook of a quiet meal at a restaurant, and hurried to his chambers to await the advent of the ticket-collector.

Punctual to the hour named this new witness arrived, and was admitted by Smith in obedience with previous instructions. The man was somewhat awed by the palatial

"Come, sit near the fire. Do you drink whisky and soda?"

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surroundings and the appearance of a servant in livery, but Brett quickly put him at his ease.

"Come, sit near the fire. Do you drink whisky and soda? That box contains your favourite cigars. Now, tell me all you know about this business."

"I can't s'y as I know anythiink about it, sir, but by puttin' two and two together it makes four sometimes—not always."

"Quite right. You're a philosopher. Let me hear the two twos. We will see about the addition afterwards."

"Well, sir, this yer lydy was a-missin' early in November. she tykes a ticket at Victoria Station on the District for Richmond; she gives it up to me at Sloane-square, arsks a newsboy the w'y to Raleigh Mansion, for he tell'd me so after you'd bin to see me, an' from what you s'y, 'as bin swallered up ever since."

"The Lord Chief couldn't state the case more simply."

"That's the first two. Now, for the second two, an' you won't forgit as I knew nothink about the lydy bein' dead, or I should 'ave opened my mouth long afore this."

"Go on. No one can blame you."

"There's an old chap—Foxey they calls 'im, but I don't know his right nyme—who drives a four-wheeler around Chelsea, an' 'e 'ad tyken a fare from the Square to the City. It might be four o'clock or it might be five, but he was on his w'y back from Cornhill when a gent, a tall, good-looking gent, a young-ish, military chap, 'ails him and says: 'Cabby, drive me to Sloane-square. There's no 'urry, but tyke care, because it's foggy.' Old Foxey nearly jumped out of his skin at this bit of good luck. He was pretty full then, for 'e's a regular beer-barrel, 'e is, but 'e made up 'is mind to 'ave a fair old skinful that night. Well, Foxey drives him all right so the Square. The gent gives him five bob and says: 'Wite here for me, cabby. You can drive me 'ome in about an hour's time.' This was at 5.30. Foxey drew up near the stytion, tells me all about it' an' stands me two beers, he was that pleased with hisself. 'E goes to give his 'orse the nose-bag, in comes the Richmond train, and out pops the lydy with the Richmond ticket. D'ye follow me?"

"Every word."

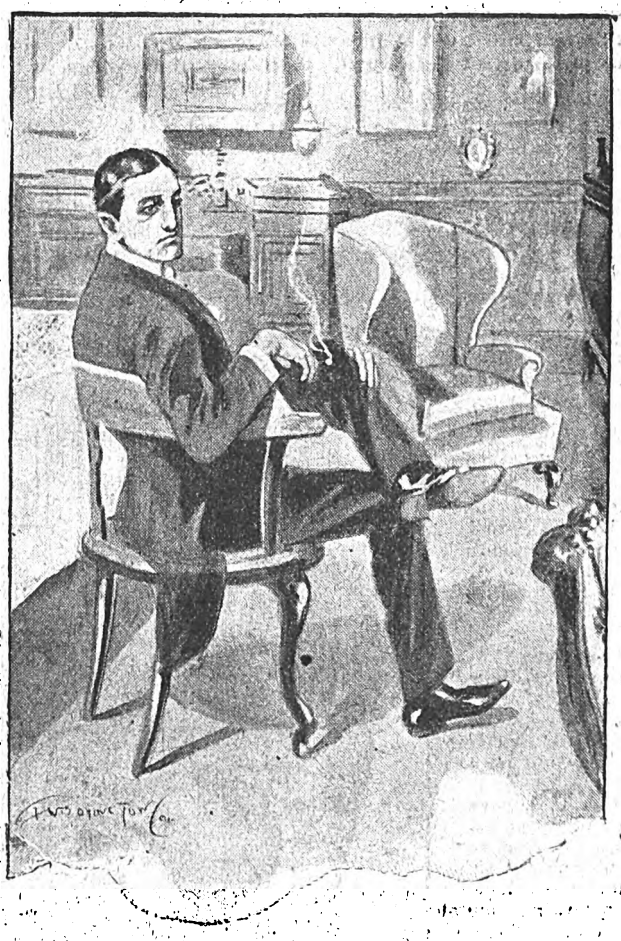
"An' you see now 'ow it is I can fix the d'y?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, I sees no more of Foxey. I missed him about the Square, so one d'y I axes at the rank, 'Where's Foxey?' An' where d'ye think 'e was?"

"I cannot tell."

"In quod!"



"Upon my word, things look very black against Mensmere. Yet I can't believe it."

"In jail. Why?"

"That's hit. That's number two of the two twos. Pardon me, but I am getting a bit mixed. Well, it seems that that very night, comin' back from Putney as drunk as a lord, old Foxey runs over a barrer. 'E an' the coster 'as a fight. The police come, an' Foxey dots one bobby in the blinker and another on the boko. You wouldn't think it was in 'im. 'E must 'ave bin paralytic."

"So he was locked up?"

"Locked up! He was dragged there by the 'eels. Next mornin' 'e comes before the beak. 'We was all drunk together, your wusup,' 'e says. 'I took a fare from the City to Sloane Square, an' 'e left me for more'n an hour. 'E comes back excited like—bin boozin' 'ard, I suppose—brings my keb up to a house, carries in a lydy who was that 'toxicated she couldn't stand, an' tells me to drive to Putney. We gits there, an' I says 'You've nearly killed my 'oss, guv'nor.' With that 'e tips me a fiver—a five-pun note, your wushup.' 'What has that got to do with the charge?' says the beak. 'Wot?' says Foxey. 'If a chap gev you a fiver for drivin' 'im to Putney wouldn't you get drunk?' With that the magistrates gives 'im three months for assaultin' the police, an' fines 'im the balance of the fiver for bein' drunk in charge of a 'oss and keb."

The ticket collector took a long drink after this recital.

"I hope you will not follow Foxey's example," said Brett, rising.

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Because I am going to keep my word. Here are the four sovereigns I owe you. In your case your two and two have made five."

"Thank you, sir. You're a brick. No fear of me meltin' this little lot. The missus will be on 'em like a bird when I tells her." And the man spat upon the coins with evident relish as he handled them.

"One word more," said Brett. "Where was this man tried?"

"At the West London Police Court."

"You can get me his real name and post it to me?"

"Sure, sir. Any way, I'll try."

"I am greatly obliged to you."

"An' has my yarn bin of any use to you, sir?"

"The greatest. It has solved a puzzle. However, I will see you again. Good-bye. Don't forget to write."

"Cornhill is in the direct line from Leadenhall-street," mused Brett, when he was alone. "Anyone coming to Sloane Square from Dodge and Co.'s office would pass through it. Upon my word, things look very black against Mensmore. Yet I can't believe it."

(*To be continued.*)

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SHORT STORIES ABOUT PEOPLE.

We devote, every week, two pages of *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "The Dregs of Wrath," by W. E. Grogan, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case the source *must* be stated. The prize of One Guinea offered for the best Storyette in this competition has been won this week by Mr. H. Wigley, 5 Sutherland Street, Sheffield. Attempts this week may deal with Stories about ANY SUBJECT, and must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, February 4th. Post-cards only, please.

Smart.

IN the High Street of a certain northern town there lived two drapers, who were determined rivals, and who were always trying to undersell or overreach each other in every possible way.

Both were shrewd, smart men, but one had slightly the advantage of the other in this respect.

The smarter of the two had his shop always open first in the morning, and his brother tradesman had to pass it on the way to his own.

Every morning he was in the habit of marking down most of the goods displayed in his windows, and after his rival had passed and noted the reductions, he withdrew the low-priced tickets and resumed his former prices.

He repeated this ruse morning after morning for several days, until the other, not to be out done in cheapness, was selling for elevenpence stockings which cost him fifteenpence wholesale.

This was the opportunity for which the smart man had been scheming all along.

He hired a lot of boys and girls to buy the stockings of his rival at the greatly-reduced rate, and, before his unsuspecting rival was aware of the fact, his entire stock of hosiery was transferred to the counter of his wide-awake opponent at elevenpence per pair, and were sold by him, as a "bankrupt lot, at a terrible sacrifice," at eighteenpence per pair.

H. W.

One Way of Getting Information.

A CANVASSER for one of the large railway companies running into Hull tells of the following incident:

One morning recently he received a communication from the head office informing him that a farmer in the district had applied for information regarding routes, rates, &c., and he had better wait upon him with a view of obtaining any traffic there might be.

On making inquiries, he found to his annoyance the address given was about six miles from the nearest station; but duty was duty, and one morning he trudged away to his destination. On arrival he found an old man pottering about a small farmstead, and made known his business. Picture his surprise when the old man said:

"Oh, yes, you're from the railway, Ah see. Well, mah dowter is a teacher, and in her examination has to know a lot aboot railways, so Ah thowt Ah would rite to'd headquarters; that's mah way."

A. R. H.

From the Gallery.

SCENE: Monday night in a small East End theatre. The auditorium packed with a hot, uncomfortable crowd. Upon the stage, which is in darkness, a death-struggle between two shadowy figures is being enacted with much gasping and shuffling, accompanied by appropriately weird music from the band.

The struggle waxes fiercer, and at last reaches its culmination by one of the antagonists crashing heavily to the stage. The other starts back, gasps harder than ever, and in an agonised stage-whisper, says:

"Great Heaven! what have I done?"

But a voice from the gallery fairly knocked the bottom out of the effect by shouting:

"Strike a bloomin' match, and 'ave a look!"

A. A. W.

Shirking the Work.

ONE may have a very good ear for a tune without knowing much about harmony, or being in any sense an educated musician.

Several years ago, during a St. Patrick's Day procession, a certain official was observed listening intently to the playing of one of the bands, the cloud on his face increasing as he listened. Finally he went to the leader and broke out:

"Whin we pay good money to a band we want thim to all play. Now, here's wan or two of yez playing 'Sint Pathrick's Day,' and the rest of yez goin' 'toot, toot!' Why don't all of yez play the chune and airn your money?"

W. I.

Room For Expansion.

A LINE of ragged little boys were ranged down the centre of a Birmingham Board School the other day for exercise.

"Toe the line!" demanded the master.

A shuffling indicated obedience. The master inspected the line approvingly, until his eye rested on an urchin so far behind the others as to be almost out of sight.

"Smith," he cried, "why don't you toe the line?"

"Please, sir, I am toeing it," said the boy; "but I've got father's boots on."

The boots were toeing the line, but the wearer stood a good six inches back.

J. R. T.

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His Word was Law.

The majesty of the law has, no doubt, a certain fascination for the multitudes of raw young countrymen who seek to enter the constabulary service, and when they have passed muster and are dressed "in a little brief authority" and the regulation blue suit, "Robert" feels keenly that he must uphold the dignity of his new position.

It must surely have been one such who laid down the law in such unmistakable terms as the following:

Two acquaintances having met at the corner of a street, stood to have a chat. They had not been there long when a policeman coming up, addressed them with:

"Come, now, be movin' on and not be makin' a crowd there."

"Two don't make a crowd," replied one of them, and to his astonishment the policeman remarked:

"One's a crowd if I say it."

They were too much surprised to protest, and without a word they "moved on." A. H.

A Willing Deputy.

A cab stopped at the corner of a road where the well-to-do people lived.

A stylish young lady alighted, and looked puzzled over the numbers of the houses.

They seemed jumbled together anyhow. She wished to find 14, but they seemed all 40 and 50.

Seeing a smart looking policeman coming down the road, she said:

"Please can you tell me where 14 is?"

"He's off duty to-day, miss," replied the smart officer, "but if you don't mind waiting—I shall be off duty in twenty minutes—I can come instead!" J. J. McC.

Never Again.

"Serves some women right," said Mrs. Gadabout, when the conversation began to lag.

"What does?" asked her neighbour, who stood with her apron over her head, waiting to hear the latest gossip.

"Trying to beat the rest of the world. You've heard about Mrs. Bargain and the auction, haven't you? No? Well, it's good.

"They were going to have an auction at Cheap and Co.'s, right across the street from where Sarah Bargain lives, and Sarah asked if she couldn't put in a sofa and a looking-glass and a lamp—things she had been trying to get rid of for a long time. Cost her ninepence to get the things taken over to Cheap's.

"When the auctioneer put up the mirror, somebody bought it for 2s. 3d. Then the lamp brought 5d., that's 2s. 8d.

"An old maid in the crowd bid half-a-crown for the sofa. Sarah thought she would raise the bid in the hopes that the old maid would go higher.

"Well, they see-sawed until the old maid bid 10s. Then Sarah bid 12s. 6d., and when no more bids were coming the auctioneer knocked it down to her.

"When she came to square up with the auctioneer—oh, well, pay his commission, if you want it that way—he charged her 2s. 1d.

"Wasn't she just mad! It cost her 6d. to get her old sofa back again home. There she was, without her mirror and lamp, and still had her sofa on her hands, and was out 8d. I tell you one thing—Mrs. Bargain will never try to sell anything at auction again."

F. W. F.

A Bet.

Jack was a jolly old bachelor. One afternoon one of his guests commented on the beauty of the new dining-table which Jack had recently purchased.

"There is only one fault with it—it's just a trifle too high. A table shouldn't exceed twenty-nine inches high, and this is an inch higher," said a guest.

"I'll bet you it is only twenty-nine inches high," returned Jack.

"Don't bet, Jack, I'm sure of it—for my eye is always correct."

"I'll bet you a fiver it's only twenty-nine inches high," said Jack.

"Well," answered the guest, "if you're willing I'll bet you; but I tell you beforehand I'll win."

"If you're right," said Jack, "I'll pay."

"Well, then, pay your debt. I measured it this morning, and it's just thirty inches high!" And Jack's guest burst into laughter.

"I know it," replied Jack, "for I saw you do it; and, knowing what a liking you have for joking I suspected your object. As soon as you went out for a stroll, I had an inch sawed off every leg; so you see the biter has been bitten. Hand over the cash!"

The guest paid amid the laughter of the company.

G. D.

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An Odd Predicament.

"COME on, James, I'm sure we shall lose that train," cried Mrs. Tuttle impatiently.

"I can't help it if we do," snarled her husband. "Besides, we shan't do anything of the sort," he added. "You go on and get the train and leave me to look after myself. I'm more than six and quite able to I hope."

Tuttle was ruffled over a lost collar-stud, and when in that frame of mind a man is seldom courteous or even consistent. But Mrs. Tuttle had had twenty years' experience of James and she was hardened. She didn't even trouble to reply but gathered her skirts round her, raised her umbrella, for it was raining with a steady persistency, and set out.

About the time she reached the station, her husband came downstairs, putting on his hat and coat as he ran. He grabbed up his umbrella and stood on the step while he made a rapid calculation of his effects and duties to see if by any chance he had neglected anything.

"Raining again," he grumbled. "It's always raining in this infernal hole. Anyway, I don't think I have forgotten anything — yes, there's my latch-key — I shall want that. Cuss!"

Tuttle turned to close his umbrella preparatory to diving into the house again, and, as he turned for that purpose, a gust of wind, whistled down from a window on the upper landing and banged the door in his face. The wind put in a little overtime as it passed Tuttle in shifting his umbrella inside out, and occupied with that he failed to notice that his left leg was fastened up in a strange and unaccountable manner.

Finding his umbrella difficult to manage in the constricted space at his disposal, Tuttle took a step outwards and was fetched up with a sudden jerk that speedily broke the tidings of great comfort and joy to him. He was hitched to the door unmistakably, and being already irritable this discovery tended towards a flow of eloquence not suitable for publication, however satisfactory it may have been to the orator.

Of course, Tuttle didn't recognise anything serious in the situation; it was just a trifling addition to the cussedness of inanimate things which that evening had been more than normally cussed. When, after a serious tug at his garment he found himself still tethered, Tuttle grew thoughtful, and about the time his wife had ensconced herself comfortably in a carriage and the train was on the move he was in a state of frantic anger and alarm.

Tuttle took a step outwards and fetched up with a sudden jerk.

The Tuttles, I should explain, had accepted an invitation to leave their little Essex retreat and try a day or two of giddy excitement in the whirl of the great metropolis under the auspices of an old friend of the family. Tuttle was quite willing, but as this story makes clear, his trousers were not sufficiently weak, and he simply didn't.

Tuttle heard the train go out—indeed, he could the lights of it streaming past the bottom of his own garden, and his feelings during the ordeal were not to be analised.

Neither for that matter were his remarks. He let his umbrella go whereso-ever it listed, and knelt down painfully to try and discover the exact nature of his anchorage.

It was simple—painfully simple, but effective! A fold of his trousers had been neatly gathered up and wedged in the closed door. Another fraction of an inch would have taken up a fold of his skin as well, but Tuttle didn't return any thanks for his escape from that, though he might have done had he given it reasonable thought.

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Tuttle hopped about on the doorstep in fluttering shirt-tails.

Bad as his position undoubtedly was, it was devoid of physical pain—just then, but the nip he would have got had he been a trifle more unlucky, would have put him in a position to sympathise with the ancient Christians and others who have had practical experience of how painful pinching can be when done at all effectively.

Tuttle had tried tugging but he tugged a bit more at first with care and consideration lest he should tear his bags and render them unfitting for decent society, and then with more and more abandon and reckless disregard for "the blooming things"—I think he must have meant "bloomer" things—until he was leaning outwards and straining on them all he knew.

He needn't have been so careful. It was good sound cloth well wedged to a good sound bit of timber, and neither door nor trousers would budge the fraction of an inch. And there Tuttle stood, the picture of an ass, fastened up to his own doorway and unable to stir beyond it. He only wanted a nose-bag to render the illusion perfect.

Solitude is a perfect craze with Tuttle. That is why he inhabited a house just outside the suburban radius down a side street which led nowhere in particular and where nobody ever dreamt of walking if it could be avoided.

His own grounds ran a hundred yards up to his nearest neighbours, who were biggish people and had their house further separated from Tuttle's by a quarter of a mile or so of landed estate.

Tuttle had lots of time and plenty of opportunity for singing, "Wait till a man goes by, Jamy; wait till a man goes by." But he didn't sing it. He didn't sing anything. His brain was busy mapping out schemes of self-help which would have raised smiles from any thought-reader who chanced to be in the vicinity that night.

For instance, he had a pearl-handled pocket-knife and a box of matches. and he was exercised in his mind, whether to use the first in whittling away the front door just sufficiently to allow him to take the rest of his garment with him, or to rely on the second and sacrifice the burnt offering on the altar of liberty.

He was very much afraid that the garment would not be the only burnt offering made, supposing that the dampened cloth would have lit, or I really think he would have tried. The first idea was of course absurd. Even Tuttle saw that when he came to consider it seriously. Three-inch doors of solid oak won't yield like match sticks when attacked by toy cutlery of that sort, and Tuttle knew it.

After an hour of deep mental stress, the sorrowful victim of dire mischance got another sort of stress to suffer under. This was a painful and deep-seated cramp, brought on by his constrained position, and developing speedily from a vague sense of discomfort to a clear and well-defined agony. The position too was irksome, wedged up in a corner and forced for hours to scrutinise a door-post which was just visible in the pitch blackness of the night.

The chilliness of the late autumn air induced a numbness that added to the awful cramp, produced a feeling of reckless despair in the hapless Tuttle.

He heard nine, ten, half past and eleven chime in successive stages from the village church-tower, and by that time he was ripe for any desperate deed that suggested itself as being likely to effect his liberation. He had dwelt rather hopefully at first on the chance of his wife returning when she found that he was not in the train, but the passage of time speedily dispersed this casual bit of optimism and set him longing for a pickaxe or something solid wherewith to batter down the door. He would have paid for the damage cheerfully just to get possession of an inch or two of cloth, which shows how easily extravagance may be born in a man.

He could have longed just as easily for his latch-key; but I suppose he didn't think of that. Desperate situations require desperate remedies, and a mere latch-key would have been too prosaic and small altogether.

All idea of going up to London had of course been abandoned by this time. Tuttle had heard the last train go through an hour before, but he wasn't interested. What he wanted to do was to get free, after that he might trouble to break into the house and get to bed; but it was the getting free that really appealed to him. He had an inspiration shortly before twelve o'clock struck, and as he proceeded to put his idea into operation, he kicked himself mentally for not having thought of it before,

It was so very simple and obvious that it really was a marvel that he had overlooked it. Since he could not get his garments out of the door why not get out of his

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garments? It would be chilly and undignified; but it was retired and quiet and there was no earthly reason why he couldn't run round to the back of the house in his shirt-tails, force an entrance and obtain as many pairs of trousers as he required—and that particular pair into the bargain.

With numbed and shaky fingers Tuttle fumbled at his braces, and two minutes afterwards he discovered one little obstacle that stood in the way of a speedy realisation of his purpose. He couldn't get his foot through the aperture, so closely was the garment drawn round his leg, and in a state of hysterical grief and anger Tuttle hopped about on the doorstep in fluttering shirt-tails and said all the wicked things he could think of.

It wasn't very satisfactory, and it was decidedly parky, and with greater difficulty than he had experienced in getting out of them, Tuttle once more donned his trousers, and wished vaguely that he was dead or drunk or something. Then he said he didn't care a simple solitary hang about anything or anybody, and he found his pipe and lit it and smoked in sullen sorrow for nearly two hours.

In giving an account of his experiences later at the police-station Tuttle said he supposed he must have fallen asleep, cold and cramp notwithstanding. He didn't remember doing so; but all of a sudden he came to a recollection of where he was, and at the same moment he heard a whispered consultation and then a stealthy creeping in the bushes below the drawing-room window.

"Hi! is anyone there?" he yelled excitedly.

No answer came, and he paused and listened again. The whispering had ceased; but he was certain of a stealthy footfall somewhere in his own front-garden, and he made another despairing appeal for assistance.

"Come and give me a hand. I'm fixed up in the door and can't get out," he called desperately.

This time there was a very decided and pronounced footfall in response, and a slim respectable-looking figure in a cricket-cap and other things came round the corner within range of Tuttle's vision.

"What's up, guv'nor," said a voice belonging to it.

Tuttle plunged into the history of his misery and woe and implored assistance at any price the man might like to name. He mentioned beer and food and gold in one breath, and undying gratitude in the next.

The man didn't hurry but seemed interested.

"Can't get out, that's a rum go?" said he as one who ponders on an elusive but absorbing problem. "Why don't you undo the door, then?"

Tuttle thought the man was a fool, but he didn't say so. Instead, he meekly went into the subtle difficulties of his position and managed to make it clear and beyond any dispute that he didn't undo the door, or release himself by any other means, because it was utterly impossible and not to be done.

He, the man, could do it if he would, and Tuttle dwelt in detail on a certain unfastened window round at the back which was easy of access and offered no difficulties whatever to an active man bent on being of service to a fellow creature in distress.

"I'll see what I can do, mister," said the noble-hearted fellow after further consideration which brought on a fresh attack of cramp and impatience in Tuttle. "But what about the dawg?"

"There isn't any dog," snapped Tuttle, impatiently. "There isn't any living creature about the place bar myself."

"All right, cocky, don't get shirty," said the man with a sudden access of gross familiarity, "I'll go and have a look."

He went. To Tuttle's over-strained nerves it seemed that a double footfall went round to the side of the house, and he could almost have sworn he heard a whispered consultation.

"Must have been the wind in the trees," he mused. "I hope he'll hurry up. Wonder how much he'll expect for this? Should think half-a-crown and a glass of whisky ought to satisfy him. He seemed rather rough, and I was a fool to mention that soverei_n. I had better tell him to call in the morning when it is day-light and there will be someone about if he should cut up rough. You have to treat these fellows with a firm hand or they'll rob you right and left."

They will! Tuttle waited and waited, but not a sign or a suggestion of the rescue party was forthcoming

"Ta, ta, cocky, sweet dreams," said one, with a derisive chuckle.

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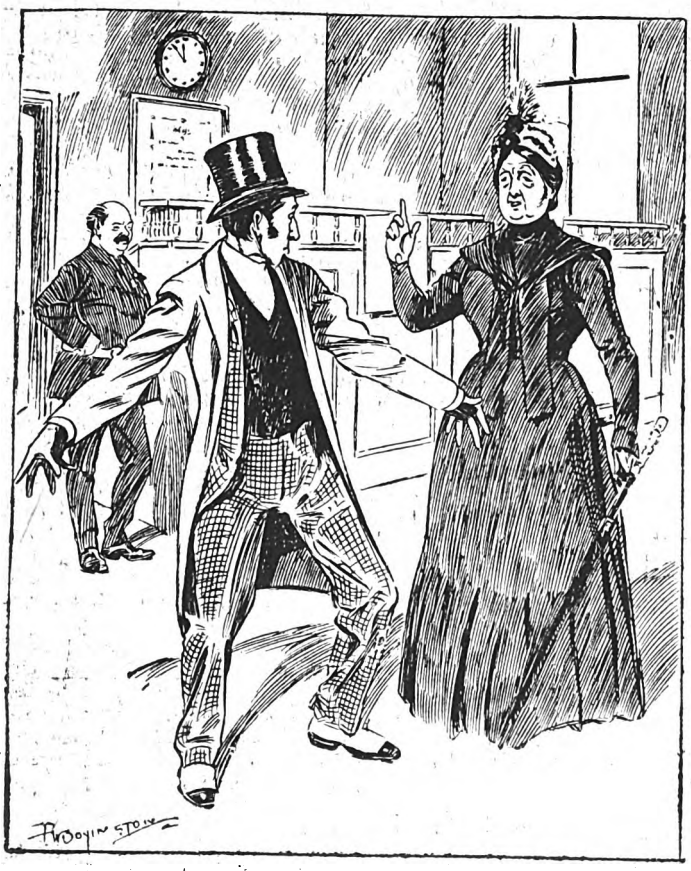

"The latch was within two inches of your nose, and you hadn't the sense to knock a hole in the glass."

He strained his eyes trying to see into the dark hall, and then he became aware of a fitful will-of-the-wisp sort of light flickering about at the head of the stairs.

"Why, confound his impudence! He's actually prying," gasped Tuttle in petrified astonishment at the sheer impudence of the thing.

"Hi! You fellow. Come down at once and undo this door. How dare you go up to my room."

A window opened above him and a surly voice growled:

"Shut up you old fool, or I'll drop something on your nut. What sort of a bally ass do you take me for?"

Tuttle stood in petrified astonishment for half a second, and then the awful truth dawned upon him. The man was a burglar, and he had simplified his work for him and given him a means of excess, and saved him no end of laborious efforts with jimmy and other nefarious tools.

He started to yell: "Police, police! Help! Burglars!" at the top of his voice.

There was a hoarse chuckle from the room above and a pail of water, pail and all, fell at his feet and deluged him.

Then another voice spoke up. It said:

"Let the old fool yell, Bill. It'll amuse him and won't hurt us. You bet he wouldn't have been there all night if yelling would have set him loose. Lor! this is a swap."

This reasoning, sound and convincing as it was, struck a chill into the heart of the unfortunate man below who was constrained to stand and wait while his portable and valuable belongings were rifled without being able to lift a hand in defence of them.

Footsteps came and went inside the house, dim lights shone mysteriously from windows and passages, and now and again he caught the sound of hoarse vulgar glee, or surpressed comment indicative of joy at some unexpected piece of luck, or annoyance at coverts from which much was expected, drawing blank.

It lasted an hour—the worst hour Tuttle had ever spent in his life—and at the end of it the lights died away, the noise ceased, and shortly afterwards Tuttle became aware of two forms outlined against the fence in the dull grey of early dawn.

They came nearer, and with an indignation too deep for words Tuttle saw that one had donned his light dust-coat, with umbrella and hat to match, and the other was wearing his brand new trousers and tall hat. They were both smoking cigars which Tuttle felt sick to think ought to be between his own lips, and they had his big Gladstone bag between them with pounds' worth of portable property in it, and a small bag apiece to balance.

"Ta ta, cocky, sweet dreams," said one with a derisive chuckle.

Tuttle called them "rude fellows," and "body snatchers," and lots of other things which hardly seemed applicable but were no doubt prompted by the callous impudence of the proceedings; but he was merely wasting the sweetness on the desert air. They didn't even trouble to stop and hit him but passed out of the gate together down the road and were swallowed up in the immensity of space.

Two hours later a policeman making an early round discovered a conspicuous character drenched and bedraggled asleep up against a door-post of "The Lindens." He shook it and obtained only sundry irrevelant observations in which the words "burglars," "door," "trousers," "all night," continually recurred.

"This looks fishy," observed the policeman *sotto voce*. "The chap's drunk or luny. He looks a conspicuous lot. Come out of it my man."

He gave the paralysed Tuttle a drag, but Tuttle didn't come. He moved out a bit—as far as the policeman could drag him, that is—and on being released, sprang back as though fastened there by india-rubber springs, and bumped against the door post. This puzzled the policeman and made Tuttle more idiotic than ever. He started to cry, and asked the man as an immense favour to lead him off somewhere quiet and retired, and poleaxe him.

The officer couldn't oblige, but his suspicions were doubled now. He knew that class of shifty tramping individual, who dabbled in burglary in an amateurish way, and then got too drunk to get away with the spoil. He flashed his bull's-eye round and made a closer investigation.

"Oh, oh! that's it, is it?" said he with a whistle of

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mingled amusement and satisfaction. "Cracked the crib, got fuddled, and pinched himself by the togs coming away. Rummiest capture I have ever made.

"All right my man, you'll be safe there for ten minutes I'll just go and have a look round and then we'll walk along together and find a nice warm dry comfy cell for one of us."

Tuttle babbled—just babbled. He was dead beat, half asleep and half fainting, and past taking an interest even in "nice dry cells."

He would have liked a nice "long narrow one for ever laid," had the officer had such a thing handy; but even the liking for that wasn't very pronounced.

The policeman went the rounds, and of course it wasn't long before he spotted the little window so invitingly left open.

"Ha!" said he, "the old dodge! in here and out at the front. This ought to mean something serviceable to me."

He went in and in two minutes had evidence enough to commit any number of Tuttles had they only been genuine *bona-fide* burglars.

The place was literally ransacked from top to bottom.

"But where's he stowed it!" he reflected, "he couldn't have got away with it, that's certain. That'll do later, anyway, when I've lodged the beauty at the station. May as well go out of the front door and see to that first."

He chuckled as he paused and reflected on a neat little fold of his prisoner's breeches safely pinched in the door. Then he released the catch and the next minute was tearing down the path and along the road in chase of a bare-headed lunatic who was splashing through mud and puddles, waving his arms and frantically yelling "burglars."

Up by the station the officer overtook his quarry, and with the assistance of a brother constable led him off to another sort of station.

"House broken into and ransacked, sir," he explained to the sergeant in charge. "Found the prisoner caught in the door-way by his trousers, sir. He said he was a burglar and had been there all night."

"Right," said the sergeant tersely. "Anything on him?"

They searched the hapless Tuttle, and then put him to soak in a cell while an inspector and the constable who had made the capture went back to investigate.

That burglary had been committed there was ample evidence; but the officials couldn't get much further than that for all their trouble.

"There's been two in this, Wilcox," observed the inspector.

"Shouldn't be surprised, sir," replied the man. "It struck me that was how it was, and I expect his pal took advantage to clear off with the swag."

Along towards midday when Tuttle was being tidied up and made to look pretty for a preliminary visit to the presiding magistrate, Mrs. Tuttle came back in haste and irritation mingled with a vague anxiety as to what had become of her husband and found her house in possession of the police.

She knew her husband better than they could have been expected to do, and she had her suspicions long before she got to the station. When she did there was a scene.

Tuttle was furious and under the stimulating influence of hot cocoa and bread and butter sane enough now to give his remarks point and pith. The police were apologetic but maintained the reasonableness of their action.

Mrs. Tuttle also had her views of her husband, and expressed them briefly in the feminine equivalent for a painful irresponsible ass.

She didn't so much object to Tuttle spending a night on the door-step if that was his idea of rational healthy amusement, but to stand there like a ninny while her valuables were coolly appropriated and marched off with under his very nose was quite another matter altogether.

"Caught by your clothes," she snorted in fine disdain. "The latch was within two inches of your nose and you hadn't the sense to knock a hole in the glass."

That was the crowning blow!

Tuttle broke down under it and went home and to bed, and stayed there for the rest of the day.

They managed to catch the burglars down the line, and they, Tuttles', got back nearly all their property intact, or I don't believe he would ever have smiled again.

As it is he has long and painful hours of meditation, and he is particularly careful on going out to stand well away from the door before closing it.

FRANK SEARS.

IN FAR CATHAY.

In the darkest, dingiest street in all Whampoa, the "street of many joys," lived the widow, Sing-Shu, and her daughter, the pretty little Li-Li.

They were very poor, so poor indeed that Li-Li, fond to a degree of personal finery, and fonder still of displaying it, had often the greatest difficulty in procuring the means of gratifying her vanity.

The widow, with her daughter's assistance, contrived to eke out a scanty living by the manufacture of the various sweet dainties dear to the heart of the average Chinese child. These she would take out into the streets and sell, sometimes successfully, at others bringing home a nearly full tray, and a heavy heart.

It was at such times as these that Li-Li and her mother suffered most, and that the poor room, which served them for a dwelling, appeared to reflect only too plainly the ill-fortune of its inmates.

The widow bore the shocks of poverty with anything but a patient spirit. Perhaps she was weary of life, and its ceaseless, monotonous struggles to maintain a bare existence. Perhaps her thoughts went back now and again to the days when, but just wedded, Hung-So, her husband, a distinguished member of the "literary" class, could and did surround her with many of life's luxuries, in the Chinese sense of the word.

When Li-Li was a tiny tot, lying crowing on the floor, and playing mischievously with the temptingly dangling end of her student-father's pigtail, the prospects of the little "Celestial" seemed bright and rosy indeed.

But there came a day when Hung-So was accused to the Viceroy of the Province by the Chief Mandarin in Whampoa of a—in Chinese eyes—terrible crime, nothing less in fact than the holding of advanced socialistic

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opinions. It was suggested that he had imbibed these from a certain young Englishman, the interpreter to a large business house in Whampoa, and a warm, personal friend of Hung-So's.

The possession of Western ideas and inclinations was then, as now, looked upon by "the powers that be" as dangerous in the extreme, and, although Hung-So was amiable and honest-hearted, seeking no personal aggrandisement nor the injury of any man, his enemies determined upon his ruin.

That the private fortune of the unhappy scholar had excited official cupidity is not only probable but certain, for after his condemnation and sentence to an indefinite period of imprisonment, and the savage punishment of the "canque," the "vultures" descended upon his property, which they devoured to the last shred, leaving his wife and child to the mercy of a cold, cruel world.

The highly-strung, sensitive nature of Hung-So could not long endure the mental and physical torture of his iniquitous chastisement. Two months after the pronouncement of the unjust judgment the wretched man succumbed to the severity of his sufferings, but it was at least two years later when Sing-Shu learnt that she was husbandless.

Li-Li, now a girl of seventeen, with the smallest feet, the glossiest black hair, and the most impertinent little nose ever seen, had a vivid recollection of her father. Like him, she was quick-brained, clever, but unlike him, she was vivacious and merry-hearted to an extent that sometimes sorely irritated her surviving parent.

Li-Li had lovers in plenty, that went without saying, but she was a born coquette, and so played with and teased her admirers that, though they still kept round the honey-pot, their adoration was in no small measure tempered with discretion.

It so happened that in the same street, "the street of many joys," there dwelt two brothers, by name respectively Quang-Ho and Ah-Sheng.

No man knew the nature of their occupation, although many suspected its true character. Periodically they would quit Whampoa in their own river boat, to be absent a month, or two months, according to the time of year.

It was noticeable that both brothers, on returning from each of these journeys, invariably paid a visit to the house of the widow, Sing-Shu. They never came together, but always at intervals of a day. Each, too, was the bearer of some trinket or other article as a present for the fair Li-Li.

Quang-Ho, the elder of the twain, generally contrived to get to windward, so to speak, of his brother, and make the first call. But Ah-Sheng was a cunning man, a man who could patiently bide the time in any and every event of this life.

He was aware of Quang-Ho's inordinate addiction to the use of the fatal drug in both its insidious forms. True, he was himself an opium-smoker in a small, moderate way, but was too clever to allow the habit to have such complete mastery over him as to interfere with his deliberately laid plans and schemes. He therefore trusted to his own self-repressive power and to his brother's intemperate indulgence to bring about that which he devoutly desired.

Both men loved Li-Li in a way, but of the two Quang-Ho's affection had about it the most reality. He was more single-hearted than his fraternal relative, who, believing in nothing in heaven, or in earth, or in the waters under the earth, had a supreme contempt for sentiment of any kind whatsoever.

It may be said at once that Quang-Ho was in Li-Li's eyes the most desirable suitor. Her mother also favoured his attentions. Ah-Sheng's presents might have been intrinsically of more value, but the donor ever spoilt the effect of his gift by his manner of giving. Try as he would to play even passably the part of wooer, he dismally failed, besides letting it be plainly seen that he would assuredly stick at nothing to obtain his end.

In the neighbourhood of the gate of "The Precious Girdle," the east gate of the city, were a few houses of unenviable reputation for gambling. John Chinaman is an inveterate gambler. He brings the desire for it into the world with him; it is in his blood. The passion for "staking upon the cast" is so strong within him that he will starve himself, strip himself, and bring himself to the verge of death almost in order to gratify his mad craving for the "fan-tan" frenzy.

Unfortunately for his own welfare, Quang-Ho was in this respect no better than the rest of his fellows.

One of the houses above all the rest had among the select initiated a name for high play and free opium. With the worshippers of the drug the latter fact operated, of course, as a powerful attraction and inducement.

It was on an evening when Quang-Ho was at the widow's house that Ah-Sheng took his way in the direction of the gate of "The Precious Girdle." A brief parley at the door of the tenement he sought, and he was admitted.

The proprietor, an evil-looking Chinaman, with eyes whose unpleasant propinquity gave him an expression of limitless villainy, seemed to have expected Ah-Sheng, for, without any salutation, he led him into a close, dark den at the extreme rear of the building, carefully closing the door after them.

"Is it to be to-night?" said the rascally dealer in men's souls and bodies.

"Yes," replied Ah-Sheng in a low, cautious tone, "to-night. I will give you notice of his coming a few minutes before."

"Good," said the other. "But the price, my friend, the price. Have you brought it with you? You promised it to-night."

"It is here," impatiently returned Ah-Sheng, producing from the bosom of his jacket a small bag, the contents of which chinked pleasantly in the ears of his companion.

This important matter settled, Ah-Sheng remarked with imperious emphasis:

"Remember, if you play me false I will do that which shall cause this house to be razed to the ground before morning. Carry out my instructions to the letter, and a similar sum to that I have now given you shall be yours. Savee?"

The wicked little eyes of the other blinked and half-closed in sweet anticipation, while he purred like some disreputable tom-cat contemplating mischief.

"I savee," he said with a cold smile and a hard compressing of the lips that augured badly for the unfortunate victim.

"The boat is ready in the little creek," continued Ah-Sheng, "on the north side, and the captain of the junk has agreed to weigh anchor directly his freight is on board. It only remains for you to do your part and earn the 'syce silver' awaiting you."

Ah-Sheng rose and left the room, passing behind the other, through a long, gaudily decorated apartment filled with three tiers of bunks on either hand, and containing close to a large charcoal brazier, glowing red, a

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table, at which sat and stood, leaning over it with bleared, staring eyes, a dozen Chinamen absorbed in their wrestle with chance. A quick glance at the miserable infatuates, and Ah-Sheng went out, rapidly walking towards "the street of many joys."

In the little hut, for it was nothing better, Quang-Ho and pretty Li-Li sat talking, the old mother dozing in a corner, quite oblivious to all that was being said.

"Li-Li," Quang-Ho was saying, "the money is enough now. My last trip has made me rich. We will leave Whampoa and Ah-Sheng, who loves me not, and go to Canton. There will we set up a little eating-house, where the delicate roast dog and the white rat's leg shall persuade in the hungry passer-by. Shall it be, my golden lily?"

"Quang-Ho is good, and we will go; but I fear the brother. Ah-Sheng is a bad man. He makes love to me, though he knows that I am yours. Can we go soon?"

"Yes, Li-Li, in three days time we will go. But," and Quang-Ho rose up and made to depart, "I have business to do to-night by the gate of 'The Precious Girdle,' and the moon is high. I must leave my little wife."

Even as he spoke a face appeared at the window, a cruel, hard face, with an expression upon it of devilish triumph.

Li-Li saw it, and caught instinctively at the loose sleeve of Quang-Ho's jacket, but she managed to repress an inclination to call out. As her eyes met those of the spy the face disappeared.

"Do not go yet," she pleaded, "I am lonely till my mother wakes."

"Little one, I must go; but I will come again to-morrow."

"Ah," she sobbed out, "to-morrow may never come—to-morrow may never come!"

Gently disengaging his sleeve from her grasp, Quang-Ho whispered a few endearing and reassuring words and went his way.

Li-Li sat on with her face in her hands for a minute or two, then she got up quickly, and enveloping herself almost from head to foot in a long, dark blue robe of Sing-Shu's, she opened the door timidly, looked this way and that, and sped in the direction of the gate of "The Precious Girdle."

When Quang-Ho reached the door of the gambling-house he found it on the jar. Pushing it open, he went through to the room Ah-Sheng had traversed but a short while ago. The proprietor, who was busy superintending the "fan-tan" table, left his occupation and smilingly addressed the new-comer.

"Better have a pipe before play," he said, furtively glancing from under his half-closed lids at Quang-Ho.

This was a temptation not to be resisted, and the old man, himself preparing the dainty morsel in the lamp which always stood burning, handed the reed to the other. At the same time he pressed upon him a cup of "samshu," to warm his heart, as he said.

Quang-Ho took the reed and the cup, and retired to one of the unoccupied bunks. The old man watched him with cunning eyes until, the drug inhaled and the cup emptied, Quang-Ho sank back torpid and breathing heavily.

Soon the stertorous respiration apparently ceased, and the other, hurrying the players at the table to their bunks, hastily went out to the door, where, in the shadow of the neighbouring shop entrance, stood Ah-Sheng.

"Well," said the latter eagerly, "is all ready?"

"Yes," answered the old man, "nothing short of the 'claw of the dragon' will have power to wake him until the sun sinks in the west to-morrow."

Ah-Sheng made no reply, but beckoning to two coolies who bore between them a black, coffin-shaped box, he bid them deposit it within the entry of the house and follow the proprietor.

In less than five minutes they reappeared bearing the inert, corpse-like form of Quang-Ho. Laying it in the box, which they then raised shoulder high, they trotted off through the gate and along the road which girdles the island and leads to the north side.

First passing something to the old man, Ah-Sheng turned and rapidly pursued the course which led to his own dwelling.

Now the two men who bore the burden were lazy rascals, and once out of sight of their employer they slackened their pace, and, by-and-by, halted for a rest. They had not observed a long-robed little figure following them. The moon was now hidden, and they were too intent upon their chatter with which they sought to beguile the weariness of the way.

At the spot they selected, by the side of the road, and on the top of a steep, green slope which trended down to a deep, stagnant pool, they laid down the box, and throwing themselves on the ground, were soon fast asleep.

There is no knowing of what a woman's arm is capable in moments of intense excitement. Li-Li felt assured, for her woman's wit had told her that in that box lay the reason for all this mystery, and she leaned over the sleeping coolies, her brain busy with thoughts of what she should do.

The sight of blood was abhorrent to her. She would not knowlingly hurt the least of living things, but here was a crisis when she must, as it were, play the part of a "Celestial" Judith. The opportunity was under her hand. How it was done she never really realised. The men lay broadside on to the slope and side by side.

With a fervent prayer to her departed ancestors for strength, the girl suddenly pushed the nearest coolie so effectively that in collision with his fellow they both rolled at lightning speed down the slope.

Two startled cries, and simultaneously almost two heavy splashes in the dark, turbid water, and Li-Li was lying in a dead swoon across the coffin-shaped, black box.

* * * * *

Quang-Ho now runs the best restaurant in Canton. His wife, Li-Li—the old mother has long been dead—is a true helpmeet for him, while, always in the way, chirping merrily in the wake of his father and mother, is a veritable little replica of Quang-Ho himself.

* * * * *

Ah-Sheng disappeared from Whampoa altogether upon the failure of the plot, and the gambling den by the gate of "The Precious Girdle" has been shut up and deserted this many a day. Ralph Enderby.

"A MOUNTAIN THAT DISAPPEARED"

is the subject of an extraordinary article in the

FEBRUARY "PEARSON'S"

describing the strange history of Mount Mazama, a mountain which committed suicide.

PEARSON'S MAGAZINE for February may be described in one word—SUPERB. Some good advice on the subject may be given in two words—BUY IT.

Printed by Horace Cox, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. Arthur Pearson Limited, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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A STRAWBERRY PICNIC.

The *Morning Leader*, July 13th, 1898, says: "Messrs. S. Chivers and Sons, the well-known jam and jelly manufacturers, understand the art of entertainment no less than the art of jam making. On Tuesday they invited a number of Pressmen to a strawberry picnic at their farm at Histon, Cambridge. The wondering pickers were delighted with the sight of two score top-hatted visitors bending their backs to the willing task of finding large strawberries. It is just twenty-five years since Messrs. Chivers started jam-making. They now have a thousand acres of land under cultivation, and employ, when busy, eight hundred hands. The jam factory is within the circle of the fruit-fields, and the fruit can therefore be handled without delay." In addition to the crops grown by the firm itself, a very large quantity of fruit is obtained from various growers in the neighbourhood of the factory. Plucked early on a summer's morn, the fruit is made into jam, or the juice extracted to flavour Chivers' Gold Medal Jellies. A lady writes from Ashton-under-Lyne: "I have tried several preparations of Table Jellies, and have not been satisfied with them, but yours have given me complete satisfaction. I shall continue to use and recommend them to my friends." Nurse A. writes: "I consider your ucted Jellies peculiarly adapted for use in the sick-room, and for those who suffer from dyspepsia." The Official Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture, 1895, says: "Messrs. Chivers' factory at Histon is now well-known throughout the country for the excellence of its manufactures."

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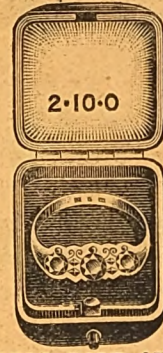

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S.S.
Feb. 2, 1901.

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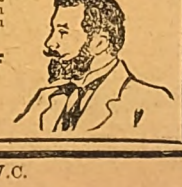

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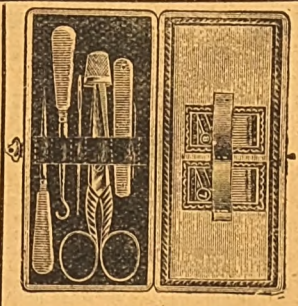

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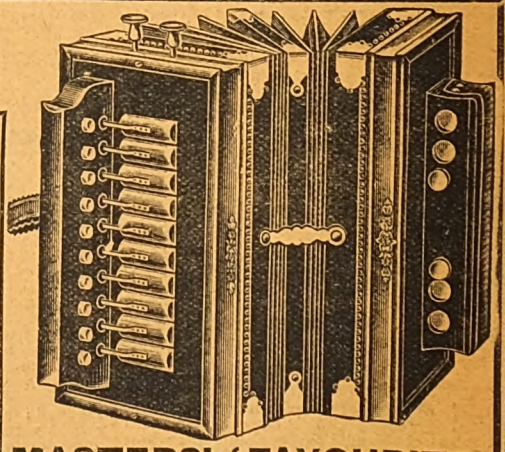

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SHORT STORIES

A WEEKLY MAGAZINE FOR HOME AND TRAIN

No. 632. FOR WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 9TH, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

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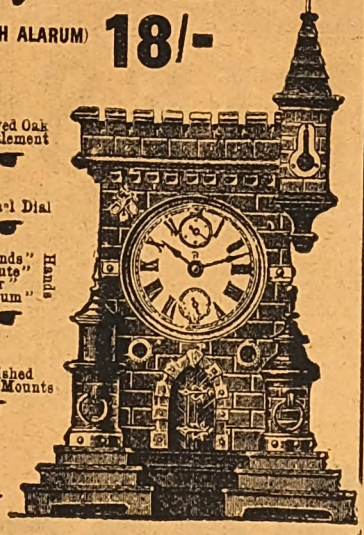

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 632.] For the Week Ending February 9th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

BY REGINALD BARNETT.

MOST houses have a story; I don't mean the architectural divisions designated by the word, but the narrative of some episode connected with inmates past or present. I know mine has, and though it deals neither with a crime nor with any accident of a thrilling sensational character, yet I think it worth the telling, and sit down to do so in a moment of leisure, with nothing of graver purpose to hinder me.

The house in question, occupied by me and mine, is situated in London. For obvious reasons I shall give no closer indications as to its exact position, but shall content myself with saying that I chose it some years ago on account of its vicinity to one of the Metropolitan Underground Railway stations, and the facilities which its site afforded for getting about comfortably and speedily from one end of the town to another. Being a business man, compelled by my commercial avocations to journey Citywards almost every day of my existence, I was naturally on the look out for such a convenient residence, and literally snapped at it when I heard it was vacant and to let.

I took it on a long lease and have ever since been able to linger at least ten minutes longer over my breakfast of a morning, a luxury which a man of my years and somewhat lethargic habit of body appreciates keenly, I assure you.

The building is an old one. No stucco, swiftly "run-up," enterprising jobbers speculation; but a good solid brick and mortar edifice, reared with care, and meant to endure.

A passing brewer's dray does not cause its stout walls to vibrate, and if I have any pressing work to do at home in the evening, my eldest daughter can stumble over a Beethoven sonato in the next room as much as she pleases without in the least disturbing me.

A roomy house, with good lofty ceilings, quaint high marble mantelpieces cunningly carved, and other indications of past glories. It was built, I should say, not only when George III. was king, but a young king too, and long before fashion had dreamed of migrating so far west as Belgravia. Goodness knows what lords and ladies held their refined jinks within its walls; what wits said good things over a pinch of snuff or a dish of tea; it is not of them I have to speak.

I am but a plain citizen, and it is enough for me that the house is a thoroughly comfortable one, suiting me and my pocket, and more than big enough to hold the whole posse of my five branches at such times when they all come home from school, and conspire together to remind of my responsibilities as a father.

The event I am going to relate happened some three or four years after I had settled myself cosily in my new abode.

I had returned one afternoon somewhat earlier than was my custom, for the purpose of celebrating my second boy's birthday, and sat at home in my easy chair like Goldsmith's good old Vicar, surrounded by my young hopefuls of both sexes.

Unlike him, however—owing to the din of romping and chatter—I entertained serious doubts as to whether I should not have been better off had I continued single and only talked of population, instead of marrying and endeavouring to bring up a large family.

Suddenly one of the children, who was at the window, attracted my attention by a remark.

"Oh, do look!" she said—it was Minnie, our youngest but one, who had not as yet overcome certain difficulties with regard to the pronouncing of her *r*'s—"do look at that old man in the steet! He's just like old Father Cwithmas, and keeps looking up here!"

"Where? where?" said the rest rushing to the window.

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I myself—as great a baby as any of them—glanced out, and, to be sure, the little thing was right. There was an old gentleman to be seen; a very old gentleman, with a long snow-white beard, who stooped very much, and steadied his feeble gait by the aid of a stick. A real Father Christmas; but by no means a shabby one, for the black clothes he wore seemed to be in excellent condition. My house appeared to be the object of his attention, and he looked at it, hesitated, and then looked at it again.

"He's coming to the door!" cried my little ones. "Father Christmas is coming to the door!"

"Coming to the door!" said I, "Good gracious, so he is! Who can he be, I wonder, and what can he want?"

He was too respectable and venerable for a tax-collecter; and the manner in which he approached the entrance of the house showed apparent timidity and diffidence. Surely he was making some mistake; I did not know him, and expected no srtange visitors.

He knocked at the door, and I just peeped out of the dining-room, where we were sitting, impelled by a certain curiosity to learn what his motive might be in singling us out.

"Does Mrs. Smith still live here?" he asked the housemaid, who ran up to him.

"Mrs. Smith, sir? No, there ain't no such party living here."

"Ah, gone, as I supposed," I heard the old gentleman say, as though speaking to himself. "It is many years ago."

There was a pause after this; and I could see that Mary, our girl, was doubtful as to what she should do next.

The old gentleman did not seem disposed to go, but stood at the door reflecting in silence.

"Can I see the present owner of the house?" he said at last.

"Here is my card; I should desire, if it is convenient, a few minutes' interview."

So there was no mistake, after all. Father Christmas had marked us for his own.

I looked at the card which the girl brought into me, and read: *Count Pogliano, Brescia.*

"Count Pogliano, Brescia!" I thought to myself. "That sounds Italian. What can a count want with me?" However, the movements of the old gentlemen had excited some interest in me, so I decided upon seeing him.

"Take him upstairs to the drawing-room," I said to the girl. "I will be with him directly."

I packed the children off to the nursery, and, having informed my wife of the strange visitor's appearance, hurried up to wait upon him.

He had taken a seat, but rose on my entering, and bowed with grave courtesy.

Face to face with him, I saw a man, who, when young, must have been strikingly handsome, and to whom age gave a singular distinguished and patriarchal appearance.

But for the stoop of his body, he would have been far above the average height of men; his nose was well cut and slightly aquiline, and his eyes had not lost their lustre. A truly venerable old gentleman, whom it was impossible to mistake for anything but a gentleman.

"Pray be seated, sir," I said, noticing that his great age—he looked over eighty—to a certainty made him rather feeble upon his legs.

He sat down again, and then glanced at me timidly, as though at a loss for suitable words with which to express his thoughts.

"I scarcely know how to explain my intrusion," he began at last, speaking with a slight foreign accent, but otherwise perfectly clearly, and employing well-chosen

"Oh, do look," she said. "Do look at that old man in the street!"

phrases. "My reasons for disturbing you will, no doubt, seem strange."

I nodded my head in silence, and waited for him to continue.

"The fact is—that I lived in this house many many years ago——"

"Indeed, sir," I put in, observing that the old gentleman was growing more than ever nervous and diffident.

"Yes, sir. A Mrs. Smith was the occupant at the time; but perhaps you have no knowledge of such a person?"

"No, sir, I cannot say I have," I replied. "My tenancy is quite of recent date—some three years and a half at most; and Smith was not the name of my predecessor."

"Ah, just so; thank you. It is many years ago; and things alter more than men. To me it seems as though it were yesterday."

He looked about him with a saddened gaze, and I could see that some of the recollections of his past moved him deeply.

"In what way can I serve you, sir?" I remarked, after a brief pause, desirous of bringing matters to some precise and business-like stage.

"That is exactly what puzzles me to explain," he

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answered, rousing himself from the half reverie into which he had fallen. The—the question is a delicate one—one purely of sentiment—I scarcely—I hardly venture upon broaching it."

But for his grave sad demeanour and the quiet courtesy of his manner, I should have been strongly disposed to consider my strange foreign noble visitor a lunatic who had by some means got astray from an asylum. Under the existing conditions, my perceptions led me to think that the old gentleman had some genuine and powerful motive for doing violence to his natural timidity, and bearding a Briton in his own castle.

"Well sir," I remarked, "you will of course, understand that unless you yourself chose to assist me a little, I——"

"Bear with me, sir," interrupted the old gentleman, meekly. "When you know all, you will not fail I hope, to excuse my trespass upon your good nature and patience. I am eighty-five years of age, and yet I have travelled all the way from Brescia for the sole purpose of visiting this house."

"Indeed, sir," I once more observed, at a loss for anything more original or fresh. "You have come a long way."

"Yes, it is a long journey for one so old as I am, is it not? But I could not make up my mind to die in peace without seeing the place once more."

Judging that this was all the old gentleman required, I gave him the opportunity of taking a good look round the room. To my disappointment, however, he seemed but little interested in the apartment where we were sitting, and continued fidgeting about uncomfortably.

"You will pardon my presumption," he said nervously, "but I am a little upset at finding the house changed into a private dwelling. It used not to be so in my time, but was let out into apartments to all comers."

"Really, sir!" I began, not a little astonished at this turn of the conversation.

"Do not misunderstand me," he resumed promptly, perceiving, no doubt, my look of amazement. "What I mean, sir, is that this alteration of circumstances makes the request I am desirous of putting extremely awkward and delicate. Had Mrs. Smith or any ordinary lodging-house keeper been here still, I should not have experienced such reticence."

"Pray do not distress yourself," I said, seeing that the old gentleman was in reality a good deal put out. "You need be under no very great ceremony with me. I am a plain man of business."

"Thank you," he replied, bowing with great courtesy. "Your extreme kindness gives me confidence. Well, then, you must know that my object in coming here was to visit the rooms which are just over our heads—particularly the one at the back, looking on to the garden. Do I express myself clearly?"

"Perfectly," I answered. "One of the rooms is occupied by myself and my wife; the other is my eldest daughter's bedroom."

"Ah!" he said—his face, which had suddenly grown almost joyful and animated for a second, falling considerably at the latter part of my statement, "I was sure my request would be an awkward one, sir."

"Why, sir?" I asked. "Do I understand you mean that you wish to go up-stairs and see those two rooms?"

"Exactly," he exclaimed eagerly. "I—I was bold enough to hope that you would grant me the favour."

"Certainly, sir; nothing can be easier. Just one word to my wife, and I will return and show you to the rooms."

I rose and moved towards the door.

"One more question," he said, in an hesitating tone. "Have there—have there been great changes made in the house?"

"Changes, in what way, sir?"

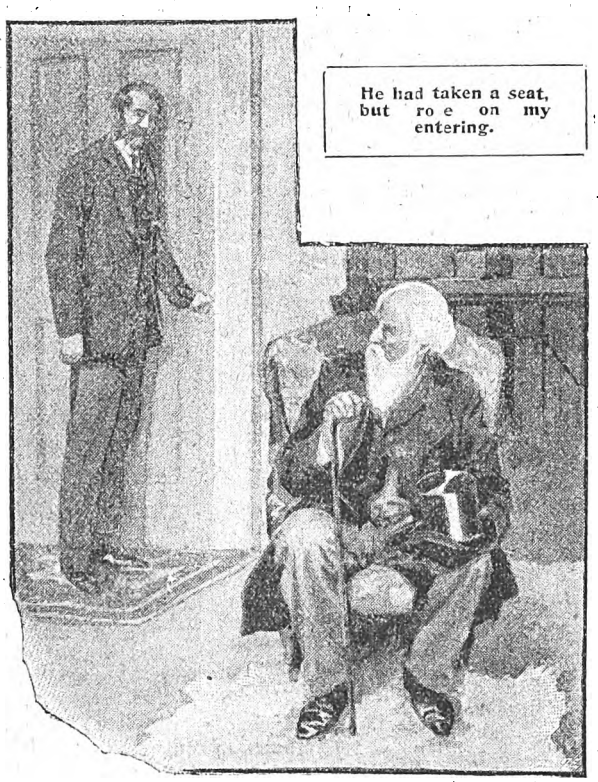
"Well—do you think the walls and—and the windows are much in the same state as they used to be years ago?"

"So far as I am able to say," I answered, puzzled and surprised at this odd query, "the house is pretty well what it must have been when it was first built. Of course, I need scarcely mention that the rooms have been painted, papered, and freshened up from time to time."

"Ah, you say they have been painted, sir?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh dear, yes; I myself had the place done up from top to bottom before I came into it."

"Thank you," he answered regretfully, "thank you.



He had taken a seat, but rose on my entering.

My questions no doubt seem strange to you; but I had my reasons for asking. I was indulging in a hope which I fear is vain."

I then went downstairs, and explained to my wife in a few words the result of my interview with the old gentleman.

"Good gracious how extremely peculiar," she exclaimed. "And you don't mean to say, John, that you have been imprudent enough to leave him all alone in the drawing-room, with all my blue china and things lying about."

"Don't be alarmed, my dear," I answered, amused at her dismay.

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"I will be responsible for his honesty. The china is perfectly safe with him."

"Well then, he must be a lunatic," she replied, with a woman's logic. "Who ever heard of a sane man coming into a house, and making such a request?"

"I don't suppose he means any harm. He is very old and shaky, and has, no doubt, some sentimental reason for wishing to see the rooms. Surely there can be no objections to my gratifying his wish."

"But—I don't like the idea of strangers going up into the bedrooms. Besides, how am I to be sure that Carry's room is particularly tidy? it isn't as a rule, you know."

"Oh, he won't pay any attention to such trifles; and I can't out of common civility, refuse such a small thing to a man who has travelled such a distance."

"Well, if you must take him, take him," said my wife at last. "Only get rid of him as soon as you can. The tea things will be in presently; and the children will be troublesome if you keep them waiting."

Armed with my grey mare's grudgingly given consent, I rejoined the Count.

"Sir, I am entirely at your service," I said. "If you will please follow me up-stairs."

Visibly moved, the old gentleman rose in silence, bowed once more gravely as I opened the door for him, and walked up slowly, under my escort, to the rooms on the next landing.

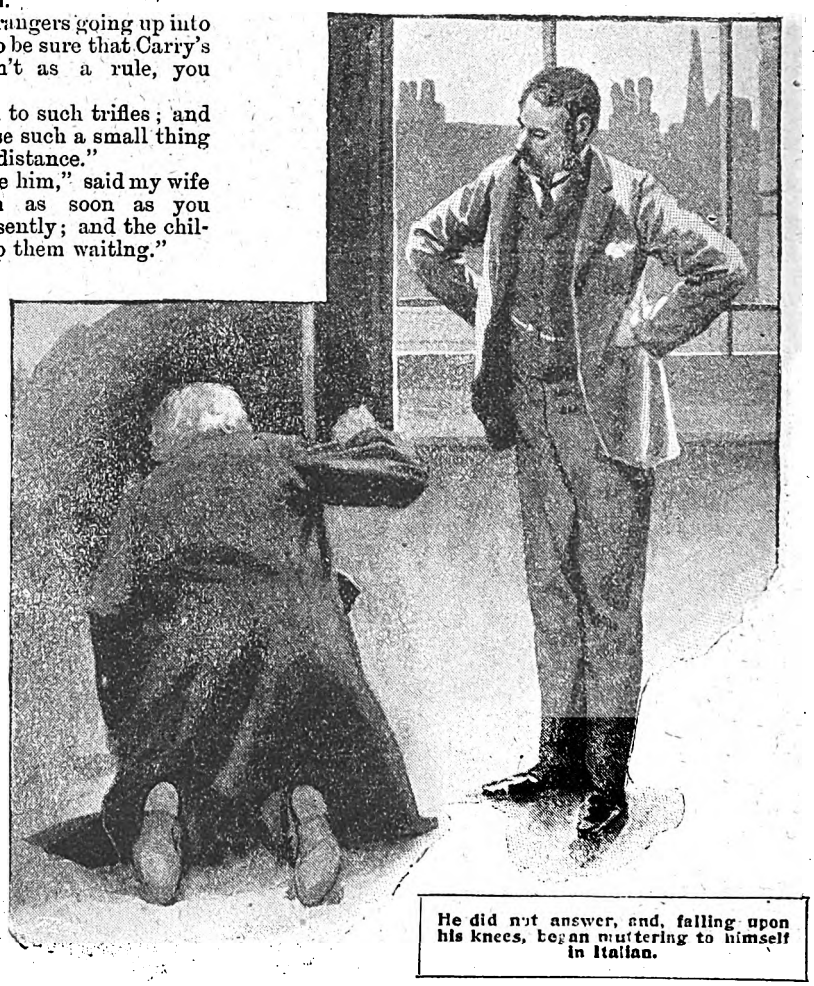
At his own request, we entered my daughter's chamber. It was a pleasant room, looking to the north and on to the garden, or rather a succession of gardens; for the space at the back was an open one, and studded with fine trees of goodly growth, which in the summer, when in leaf, presented a charming green and rural aspect—quite a cheering and refreshing view not often to be obtained from houses situated in such a dense and central district as ours.

I glanced at the Count. The sight of the room caused so deep an emotion in him that I made haste to procure him a chair, lest he should fall.

He thanked me feebly.

"I daresay you were surprised," he said, "at the effect produced upon me; but you must know that, forty years ago, I lived in this very room. My poor Teresa—my wife, sir—was with me, and died here. Our son Carlo was born here. He is also no more; he died the death of a brave man at Solferino, while fighting for the land of his forefathers. I am alone now in my old age, and this is all that remains to me of the past."

"We were very poor," he resumed dreamily; "but we were young, full of hope, and rejoiced to have escaped a great danger. I had been compromised as an intimate friend of Count Confalonieri—you may have heard of the great Italian patriot, sir?—and I was about to be arrested. A companion warned me, and I succeeded in escaping from the Austrian bloodhounds. I fled to England, and my fond Teresa followed me here to this house, to this very room, and shared my lot. My land, my estates, were all confiscated. Though absent, I was sentenced to death as a traitor to my country, and I had to struggle for daily bread as a teacher of languages. But we were happy, in spite of our poverty. When I came home, Teresa was waiting with a smile to receive me. In the summer, however poor we might be, that window-sill was gay with flowers; and those gardens, sir—those gardens, sir, were her particular delight. She gave them the name of Bosco Bello. All the birds knew her, and came to her and helped her to sing songs to our little Carlo. They are both dead, and the room is a good deal changed; but the gardens, the trees, are here still.



He did not answer, and, falling upon his knees, began muttering to himself in Italian.

"All is over now!" continued the old gentleman, making an effort to control his feelings. "My title, my riches, have long since been restored to me; but what are they to me? One more request, sir; I know I have been most selfishly intruding upon your time and privacy, but grant me yet one more favour before I take my leave. May I look behind that shutter by the window?"

"That shutter!" said I, surprised.

"Yes," he replied. "It is sheer folly on my part, I know,

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after so many years have passed; but I still feel a mad hope in me to find something there that I remember well in the old days."

"Look, by all means," said I, a trifle suspicious that grief had preyed upon the old gentleman's mind, and that he was not perfectly sane.

He advanced, drew the folded shutter out with a trembling hand, and peered anxiously at the board or panel behind it.

"Look!" he exclaimed suddenly, with a kind of chok sob. "It is still there! *Gran Dio!* it is still there!"

"What is still there?" I asked, approaching him.

He did not answer, he seemed to forgot even my presence, and, falling upon his knees, began muttering to himself in Italian.

In a corner, blackened by the dirt and dust of time, but still fairly decipherable, was a faint scribble in pencil, and in a woman's hand.

"She wrote them two months before she died," said the old Count. "The verses are poor, but they mean more to me than the most beautiful lines of Petrarca. Her heart was in them. I am truly grateful to you for your courtesy and kindness. With your permission, I will now retire."

"Sir," said I with a great sense of sympathy and pity for the old gentleman, "if you ever desire at any time to come here again, pray stand upon no ceremony. I shall be only too pleased to welcome you."

I held out my hand, and he grasped it warmly.

"Thank you," he answered, "thank you. I hope to see you again—indeed, I have something more to ask of you; but not now, not now. I need rest, and have wearied you quite enough."

As I led him to the street-door, through the hall, two of my impish, mischievous little ones put out their curly heads, and, giggling to themselves, as children will, called out in shrill, audible voices:

"Father Cwithmas."

The old gentleman turned round, saw them, and smiled benevolently.

"Your little children, sir," he asked. "What did they say? Did I hear them call me Father Christmas?"

"Do not pay any attention to them," I said, frowning portentously. "They are exceedingly rude and ill-behaved."

"Nay, nay, sir," he replied. "Father Christmas is a good name."

He approached them as they came out timidly one by one, and patted them gently on their cheeks and heads, saying a few kindly words, after which he took his leave and disappeared, hobbling round the corner.

The next day a van drove up, and a vast package of elaborate toys of all sizes and description came to hand; and we knew the giver by means of a scrap of paper thrust into the parcel, on which the words, "From Father Christmas," were scrawled tremulously.

The good old Count must have ransacked and bought up the whole of a toy emporium, and my children were, of course, in ecstacies of delight.

I saw him once again in the flesh. He drove up one evening—three days after his first visit—and, when our preliminary greetings were over, I sounded him as to his desire to see once more the room in which the happiest period of his life had been spent.

To my astonishment he declined to trouble me. His pilgrimage had been accomplished, and he proposed returning to Italy in two or three days; but he had come to beg one more favour of me.

"It is my wish, if possible, to take that shutter back with me," he said. "I should like to close my eyes reading Teresa's lines."

I promised that this wish of his should be acceded to, and he shook my hands warmly, and, as I think, invoked a blessing upon me and mine in Italian.

The dusty board, on which the faint lines were still preserved, was duly forwarded to Count Pogliano at his hotel. I myself never saw him again, but some two years after the event, when the incident of his visit was almost forgotten, a letter bearing an Italian post-mark came, informing me of the old gentleman's death, and advising me that, in accordance with certain instructions contained in his will, I should be in receipt of some tokens of his regard, which I was earnestly desired to accept. The said tokens reached me in due course: a marvellous piece of gold plate, the genuine workmanship of that cunning artificer, Benvenuto Cellini (to this day in my drawing-room, under a glass cover, and partly the admiration, partly the envy, of my friends); a host of curious and valuable trinkets—all family relics—for my wife and children; and a little beautifully-executed minature portrait of the Contessa Teresa Pogliano, which I was begged to hang up, for so long as I remained in the house, in the little room where she herself had lived happily, and died.

The children called out in shrill, audible voices: "Father Cwithmas."

There it is fixed at this moment, against the wall, and as near the window as possible; looking on to the old smoky trees, and greeting Bosco Bello with a serene peaceful smile.

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THE REAL THING.

OR, HIS LAST GAMBLE.

THE dainty drawing-room of a West End flat.

A pretty girl seated at a piano, softly rippling Tosti's "Return."

A warm blush still lingers upon her cheeks; her eyes are intently fixed on the sheet of music before her.

By her side stands a tall, well built man, upon whose features an expression of keen disappointment is plainly discernible.

"Then that is your decision, Miss Newcombe?"

"Yes."

"It is a serious matter to refuse."

"Marriage is more serious still."

"Granted. But I had thought you cared for me, and your decision comes upon me as a revelation."

"I had made up my mind never to marry."

"And I love you!"

"I am sorry—that is, you flatter me; but really, my duty to my father demands that I shall continue as I am."

"That is a noble sacrifice—for your father's sake. But do you think he shares——"

"Oh, pray don't mention that word, Mr. Hampton; that is the cause of all my trouble!"

"How so?"

"This horrid gambling on the Stock Exchange."

"Surely you don't——"

"Gamble? Certainly not! I see the folly of it."

"So do I. A friend of mine who thought he had discovered a royal road to wealth plunged a bit—had a flutter or two. But I—that is my friend burnt his fingers."

"Dear me! How painful."

"Ha, ha! You don't understand. He made several investments, on the advice of those who said they knew a lot about it. Instead of a rise in the prices coming off, they dropped and I—er—my friend lost every stiver."

"Ah, I understand. If your friend burnt his fingers, I'm afraid my father has cremated both his arms up to the elbow. Poor old dad. He is too credulous."

"What! Does the Admiral indulge in a flutter?"

"I am sorry to say yes; and the flutter invariably results in someone flying off with his money. The consequence is—I will be candid with you—he has lost every penny he possessed. We live on a small annuity, which he cannot touch, left me by my mother.

"Were he left alone, what would he do?

"That is why I have decided never to marry unless he can be reformed."

"But what reformation does he require? Without money, he cannot gamble on the Exchange."

"Ah! But he is such a slave to this terrible vice. You have no idea how the passion has gained the mastery over him. I fear—I dread to think about it, but I sometimes fear he will forget everything and sacrifice his honour and his name in getting the wherewithal to gratify his passion. It is terrible. My darling old dad."

Tears stand in the girl's eyes as she thus expresses herself. She goes on:

"How could I become the wife of any man who might be dragged into the mire by the act of a weak and infatuated relative?"

The voice of Hampton bears traces of emotion as he replied with some warmth:

"Under no circumstances could I regard your father with any feelings but those of a son. My love would be poor indeed if I allowed such fears to stand in my way! Mabel, I love you. Be my wife and make me the happiest of men."

"I cannot, I cannot consent."

"Is your rejection conditional? If I undertake to induce the Admiral to renounce for ever this weakness of his, may I hope—"

"I fear it is useless. If he would renounce it for anybody he would do it for me I know. But I have tried in vain."

"At any rate I shall endeavour to bring about that which you desire—the reformation of your father."

Again the tears flow into the big blue eyes of the distressed girl. She presses her lover's hands. He lifts one of hers to his lips and kisses it devoutly. So great is her emotion that, without a word, she hurries from the room.

Jack Hampton was not brought up in a very romantic school; he left Oxford to become a partner in his father's very flourishing firm of government contractors; and as he sits in an armchair alone in that pretty drawing-room, he is compelled to laugh quietly to himself at his self-adopted *rôle* of reformer.

"Is she only knew that I had been a bit warm on the same game myself; if it hadn't been for the hard headedness of my governor, where might I have been? Running a ranche; an undischarged bankrupt; anything bad, in fact. Happily the old man put on the brake at the proper time—and just saved me from ruin. It's a glorious life—the turf itself is quiet before it—on 'Change; full of excitement; a fortune in a day; ruin in an hour. It is a fascinating game indeed, and I have a big job before me to reform an old hand at the business—but here he comes."

Sundry sounds in the passage announce the advent of Admiral Newcombe, and he enters the drawing-room, slowly enough owing to his unwieldy size, which was designed on lines more suitable for a country mansion than for a bandbox flat in fashionable London. He greets the young contractor cordially.

Then, looking around carefully to make sure that they are alone, he asks in what he no doubt considers a whisper, but wasn't:

"How did you get on, my boy?"

"Badly, Admiral."

"Ha! How's that?"

"Miss Newcombe has rejected me."

"Too bad. But she's a keen judge of character, is Mabel."

"Mine is at fault, evidently."

"Poor fellow. But was her decision final?"

"Well, no; I may say there is hope if I succeed in a certain task."

"And that is?"

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"The reformation of an old reprobate."

"What? How extraordinary! An old reprobate, did you say?"

"Yes; a frightful old scorcher."

"Very extraordinary! Fancy making a missionary of you! Ha ha! Some of her poor pensioners in the slums, I suppose. Well, I wish you luck, but if he is the old rake your words imply, I'm doubtful of your success. These old sinners want a lot of reforming."

"And he is an awful old rake; but I shan't despair. I'll keep my eye on him in future."

"He'll want a lot of that my boy. But, pardon me, Hampton, my boy; have you seen the latest tape prices on 'Change."

"No, Admiral; my investments are not of the risky sort, I don't take very much interest in speculative groups. In fact, I don't approve of gambling on 'Change at all."

"H'm. I don't quite agree with you there, Hampton. Remember that most of our millionaires operated on 'Change."

"So did most of our bankrupts. Our millionaires control the movements as a rule. They wouldn't be millionaires if they didn't."

"Well, well; someone must take a little risk. Now, I have a really good thing on—thousands in it, my dear sir. I can put you on; but mind, on the strict Q.T. Do you ever have a flutter?"

"Not very often. In fact, it is some time ago, since I did anything in that line."

The Admiral again looks around the room with an air of caution. Bending forward he grasps Hampton by the arm, shaking it at every syllable, as, in a sort of fog-horn whisper, he utters these words:

"Put your last shilling into 'Blue Snakes' my boy, they are the real thing!"

Hampton begins to look interested.

"Why, Admiral, a week ago they were offered to me at ninepence each any quantity up to ten thousand."

The Admiral grins ecstatically.

"So they were; so they were; quite so; but look here," and he produces a *Financial Stunner* from his coat pocket, "what were the closing prices yesterday? Fifteen shillings and sixpence! Think of it—fifteen shillings and sixpence sterling! Now, here's a bit of news for you! To-morrow at this time they will be selling by thousands at par, or over £5!"

"Are you sure of this, Admiral?"

"Positive! Here is a wire from an old friend of mine in the City. 'Listen:

> "There is every possibility of The Big Crowds Amalgamated purchasing the 'Blue Snakes' to-day at the handsome price of £3,500,000 on the strength of a code cable received yesterday. 'Blue Snakes' are therefore a likely investment.—JACKSON."

"What can be plainer than that. At the price named, every single share should to-morrow be worth £5 each. It's a wonderful chance, and it would be flying in the face of Providence to neglect it. I am going to speculate my last farthing in it, and I advise you to do likewise. It's a dead cert. What's the correct time."

The Admiral is puce in the face from excitement as he pulls out his own watch to check Hampton's.

"Five minutes past three! I've wasted too much time talking."

"Hampton, do me a favour—a service—for which I shall be ever grateful! I can't get about owing to my lameness! Like a good fellow now! This is too precious a matter to confide to the telegraph or telephone service! I beg of you to take a hansom at once and rush for the Stock Exchange! Here's a bank draft for three hundred. Give it with this letter of instruction to Knowles the broker—confound him! he refused to give me credit last month, but no matter—he's the safest man I know. You will go? Right! Off with you!

"There's not a moment to be lost! Promise the cabby double fare to hurry. Now then! Don't lose a moment, my boy. The purchase must be made before four o'clock or all is lost! Hurry, Hampton, hurry! Come back to dinner!" And not permitting a word of protest or acquiescence

"Then that is your decision, Miss Newcombe?"

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to issue from Hampton's mouth, he pushes him to the door of the flat, which he opens, and almost shoves the bewildered contractor into the arms of the lift attendant.

"Hurry, Hampton! Hurry!"

Then the Admiral rushes back to his drawing-room the window of which commands a view of the street below.

"Hurrah! He's got a hansom," and the old man capers about the room in spite of his bad leg.

* * * * *

"Here's a telegram for you, father."

It is nearly two hours since Jack Hampton left the house on his important mission.

Mabel enters the little smoke-room of the flat, bearing in her fingers the usual unmistakeable envelope.

The Admiral, who had been trying to keep down his excitement, grabs the missive; tearing off the cover in a tremendous hurry.

"Ha! What's this? Good God!"

A terrible groan bursts from the white lips, and the old man totters back into his armchair paralysed in every limb.

Mabel, almost fainting with fright, rushes out for some water, and places the glass to the old man's lips. His features, drawn and ghastly, have the greyish shade of death.

The devoted daughter trembling in every limb, and as pale as the proverbial ghost, bathes her father's forehead. He gradually revives. His groaning is awful to hear. Suddenly he realises that it is Mabel who is tending him. He shudders. Then he makes a violent effort to be calm.

"Oh, what is the matter, father?"

"Nothing, nothing, my girl; just another little financial disappointment. I'm all right now."

His shaky hand stretched forth to grasp the cause of the scene. He repeats the message almost unconsciously:.

"'Blue Snakes' purchase declared off. Don't invest. Shares worthless.—JACKSON."

He sinks back again into his chair.

"What does it mean, dad?"

The old man burst out into a torrent of sobs and moans.

"Don't speak to me, dear, don't speak to me! I'm a mug!"

"A mug!" gasps the girl. She thinks he has gone mad, and fancies himself to be such a utensil. "Oh, father, don't think that you're a mug."

"I am—I tell you. And a stone-broke mug too," he groans.

"Tell me all, father."

"I will," the old man sobbed, choking with grief. "I'll make a clean breast of it. I've spent the last penny we had in the world in a mining speculation! Two hours ago I handed the money to Jack Hampton to go and purchase the shares. That wire now tells me that the shares are worthless."

"Jack Hampton did this! Oh father! What a deceitful man! He promised to cure you of this terrible passion—and now he aids and abets you in spending your last farthing. The cruel wretch!"

"It's my fault, my dear. I begged him to do it. I forced him to do it. Don't blame him. It's all the fault of your silly old father that everything we have in the world is lost and we are beggars!"

"Beggars; no father; no beggars. There is still my £300 annuity which is due on the 17th, why, that's to-day!" exclaims the girl, joyfully clapping her hands. "That will keep us for ever so long!"

The old man now breaks down completely, weeping like a child.

"Oh," he moans between his sobs, "my heart is broken. My girl, I have robbed you. I received the bank draft to-day, but my cursed foolish brain spun visions of multiplying it by six on the Exchange, and I resolved to use it for that purpose. Oh, forgive your wicked old father."

Mabel stands as though stunned by the revelation. Could it be possible that her father had been so unutterably infatuated as to thus bring them to poverty, temporarily at any rate? She is forced to admit it. It was what she had been fearing, that her father would stop at nothing to gratify his passion for gambling.

And Jack Hampton, in whom she had placed entire confidence had been, in spite of his solemn undertaking, a party to this cruel, crushing injustice. This man who had pleaded so hard to win her hand and heart, was almost guilty of robbing her.

Her belief in man's honour was rudely shattered. Yet she resolved to bear up under the bitter blows.

"Dad, dear," she whispers softly in the broken old man's ears, "don't fret any more. If only this will show you the folly of gambling, and be the means of saving you further trouble, I will regard it as a blessing. I will work for you, if necessary, and we shall be very happy together."

"Ah, never again; never again!" vehemently declares the old gentleman. "I have done with it for ever! Here, before you, my daughter, I solemnly promise never to gamble again!"

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"That is enough, dad dear; now see how happy we shall be together."

* * * * *

Mabel was not present when Jack Hampton returned to dine with the family; yet the Admiral's greeting was none the less hearty.

"The 'Blue snakes' have bitten me after all, Jack, my boy," he said, a little sadly.

"I thought their fangs looked a bit dangerous, sir," responded the contractor, without the slightest show of sympathy.

The old gentleman rather resented this.

"You don't appear in a hurry to offer your regrets for my loss," he remarked, a trifle peevishly.

"I am in too high spirits to care about regrets," said Hampton, airily. "When I went to the Stock Exchange on your mission I met an old friend of mine who knows more about shares than most people. He gave me the straight tip on a parcel of Kaffirs. I invested a couple of hundred and just before I started here I had a wire from my friend stating that I have landed a cool thousand over the deal."

"I congratulate you, Hampton. Still I think you might have spared a little sympathy for the losses of an old friend."

"What losses. I don't know any friend of mine who has lost anything."

"What!" the old man jumped up in sudden joy. "Didn't you buy those 'Blue Snakes' after all?"

"No, sir. My friend assured me that the reptiles were being rigged by a gang of bears, and declared that if you touched them with a forty foot pole you would be landed. So here's your draft."

"You don't—you can't be in earnest."

"I am."

The Admiral uttered a whoop of joy.

"Then I'm saved! Thank Heaven! You're a true friend, Jack; not to throw my money away recklessly! My heart is as light as air! You have saved—but hold on! Look here, how is it you didn't invest the money in those good things your friend put you on? Why, it would have meant a profit of—let me see—great Scott! £1,500. Think of it. Hampton, I'm extremely vexed with you. Why, good Heavens, it would have been a fortune for me! What induced you to drop me out of a good thing like that. Oh, it's a confounded shame, sir!"

Hampton was utterly astounded.

"How could I dare to risk another man's money without his authority? Why, it would have been absolutely dishonourable! Suppose the deal had turned out like the 'Snakes.' What should I have said to explain?"

"Oh, you wouldn't have had to explain anything but a jolly good turn of luck. As you *are* so confoundly scrupulous, why did you undertake the job at all, when you had promised my daughter to accomplish my reformation—the reformation of an reprobate, a regular old scorcher, a doddering old rake, and so on!"

Hampton looked very foolish and guilty; but he soon brightened up.

"Well, sir, that's a good reason why I didn't put your money on the good thing. That would hardly have reformed you—it would have encouraged you!"

"Well, I suppose I must forgive you. But I don't think I'm under any obligation to you."

Mabel had entered the room in time to hear the latter part of the conversation.

She came forward and said:

"Jack; if dad is not under an obligation to you, I am."

"Well," sighed the old gentleman, as he rustled the bank draft between his fingers, "at any rate it is better that this should have been saved. By the way, Jack; you must introduce me to that knowing friend of yours on 'Change. He might be able to put me on some other good thing—"

"Father; your promise," said Mabel reproachfully.

The Admiral sat down.

And Jack whispered:

"And yours, Mabel? Have you forgotten it?"

And she murmured:

"No, Jack, dear. I am yours."

"No, Jack, dear. I am yours."

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THE LION'S WARS

The British Legion in Spain.

(1835-1837.)

WHEN King Ferdinand of Spain died in 1835 his widow at once installed her daughter as Queen, contrary to the national Salic Law of Spain that no woman could wear the Spanish crown.

A few months later, Don Carlos, the brother of the deceased King, announced his claim to the Spanish throne, and his pretensions were at once acknowledged by the inhabitants of the northern Basque province. The result of this was civil war.

It is true that this very ancient Salic law had been set aside by the King shortly before his death, but as Ferdinand even in his prime had been little better than an idiot, and as its abrogation had not received the assent of the Cortes and the nation, Don Carlos declared that the throne belonged to him.

To us, to-day, Don Carlos seems to have had a good deal of justice on his side, but in 1835 Britain thought differently.

Whilst the Spanish Queen's soldiers were vainly endeavouring to subdue the agile, brave, hardy mountaineers, public opinion here had become so convinced that it was the duty of all Britain to see that the rights of the infant Queen should be upheld, that when the Queen Regent found that the southern Spaniard had no chance of overcoming his northern brother, she besought in tearful accents the aid of Spain's old and generous ally, Britain.

Needless to say the appeal was not made in vain, and here let us state in reply to the criticism of those who may be of opinion that the story of a British volunteer force fighting for a foreign power should not be included in the list of Britain's wars, that the enthusiasm roused by Spain's appeal for help was so great that on June 10, 1835, William IV. by the advice of his Privy Council, issued an order permitting any English subject to enrol himself in a British Legion for service in Spain for the term of two years.

But the support accorded by the government went still further, the newly-formed Legion was armed and fully accoutred from the Tower and was publicly recruited by the beat of the drum with the Union Jack flying. No time was lost in raising the force. Recruiting depôts being opened in each of the three kingdoms, the recruits were of course very representative. Starving peasants from Ireland, mill hands from Lancashire, City clerks, shop assistants, agricultural labourers, barristers, veterans of the Peninsular War, broken down swells, betting men, and members of many other trades and professions filled the ranks. The officers were all experienced soldiers, mostly on half-pay.

The commanding officer was Lieutenant-General Sir G. de Lacy Evans, a brave officer no doubt, but sadly lacking in the peculiar qualities required for carrying on a war in the northern mountains of Spain against the finest guerilla soldiers in the world.

Still he had earned such distinction in India in 1807 and 1810, had shown such conspicuous bravery against Ameer Khan and the Pindaris, and had earned in America such a name for Indian border fighting, that in the

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opinion of military experts no better selection could have been made.

The experts were all wrong as we shall presently see.

The legion landed at St. Sebastian, famous in the annals of our own wars for its siege, the fearless assault of our soldiers, and the subsequent looting of the town. The Carlists were in strong force in the neighbourhood of the town, but General Evans, although a daring man, was not a reckless officer.

He knew the value of discipline so before commencing operations he devoted an entire month to drilling his men. The Carlists were not in good s irits when the British Legion landed. Zumalacarregui, a guerilla chief of great repute and their best leader, had fallen at the siege of Bilboa. His death, therefore, whilst depressing his own side, had raised the confidence of the Christinos.

The desire of our men to try conclusions with the Carlists was so great that when their leader told them to wait till they had learned their drill they nearly mutinied.

When they had at length learned their drill they were ordered to be under arms on August 30, 1835, General Evans having resolved to attack a force of Carlists stationed at Hernani. After marching a few miles the Legion found itself at the foot of a hill held by the Carlists who to strengthen their position had run a line of intrenchments along the summit. The Spanish soldiers not relishing the presence of the Legion which they declared was an insult to their courage, charged the hill at the point of the bayonet. The Carlists being less than fifty strong took to flight, whilst the Spaniards well satisfied with their achievement, lay down to rest.

The consequence was that an easy chance of capturing Hernani was missed. The Carlists were quick to perceive the error. The Legion watching the distant hills for the appearance of the Spanish saw the Carlists rapidly descend the hill, cross the little bridge, and flock into the town. When our men, who were greatly puzzled, found the soldiers they had come to assist smoking tranquilly at the top of the hill, they had stormed an hour before, they waxed very wroth.

Being, as the historian puts it, "fond of nothing but fighting, they turned on their Spanish allies and thrashed them soundly with fists and musket butts."

Burning to retrieve their prestige and goaded by the jeers of the British, the Spaniards next day attacked the town with great fury. They were, however, pushed back with such resolution by the Carlists that a portion of the British Legion, 500 strong, was ordered to their assistance.

Although this was the first time the majority of the regiment had been under fire, they marched with unflinching steadiness across a huge field of Indian corn of a height so great that the red caps of the Chapelgorris—a corps composed of foreign mercenaries attached to the Legion—who preceded them looked like gigantic poppies and despite the murderous fire of the Carlists succeeded in reaching the shelter of a friendly dip in the land.

After a breathing spell they made a dash for the ridge of a neighbouring hill in order to divert the Carlists' attack on to themselves. With loud yells they reached the top, drove the defenders down, and then raced like deer up the steep brown rocks of the Santa Barbara.

The British soldier of those days wore stocks, tight fitting uniforms, heavy ill-made boots, whilst their head-gear was extremely large and fearfully heavy.

The Legion finding that tight belts, stocks, and big helmets, were unsuited for the mountains of Spain forgot their discipline and did the job in their shirt sleeves. The Carlists fought like lions, but they stood no chance with our men, who though they followed such unwarlike callings as shop-assistants, clerks, agricultural labourers and the like at home, fought as only Britons can fight.

The main body of the Legion were about following up their success when they saw that a company of the fourth (the Queen's) had been surr unded by a large force of the enemy. Dashing down the Santa Barbara they swarmed up the hill where the beleaguered company were battling against huge odds, pouring such a destructive fire into the fl nk of the Carlists that their comrades were able to escape. But the position of the hill enabled the Carlists to mass in such overwhelming force that the first Regiment had to fight its way out of what the enemies of the expeditions at home described as a well-planned ambuscade.

Towards the close of the day it must be confessed our men were in full retreat, the pursuit being so keen that at one time the Carlists got between us and St. Sebastian. But the bayonet pulled us through, our losses at the finish being half those of the Spanish. During the retreat, a sergeant and a grenadier of the first Regiment had been shot dead. Believing that the bodies would be sent in our men left them behind. That night the Carlists cut the bodies up and marched through the town of Hernani with the flesh of their foes stuck on the points of the bayonet.

As the Peace Party at home had been endowing the Carlists with every possible virtue, including a quite exceptional humanity in the conduct of war, one would have thought that they would have relinquished their cause. Political hatreds, however, are not easily allayed. The peace party got rid of the difficulty by declaring that the Legion had invented the charge in order to draw attention from their own cowardice and incapacity.

It was no good t e supporters of the war asking their opponents to wait till th Legion caught the enemy on a high road or an open field where the cavalry could get to work. The Legion wa s so persistently ridiculed that although they had gone into winter quarters when the news arrived, they so clamoured to be led against the foe that General Evans had to begin a fresh campaign.

In the hopes of catching the Carlists napping, the greatest secrecy was obse.ved; a needless precaution, for the British quarters were so honeycombed with spies that our slightest movements were soon known in the mountains. Greatly therefore to the surprise and disgust of Gener l Evans the Carlists anticipated his plans by making a feint on the picket near Ametzagana hill a little to the left of the English centre. As soon as the greater part of the troops had been hurried off in the direction of Ametzagana hill the real attack was developed.

A large force of Carlists was hurled against the village and fort of Abza which commanded the important town of Pessages. Our soldiers were discussing their morning meal of wine and bread on the Ametzagana hill when an officer galloped furiously up.

The drums rattled, the bug ers dispersed among the hills to recall all wanderers. "Fall in!" "March!" Then came, "Quick march," and when another breathless messenger appeared, the ominous "Double quick" was ordered. Still another messenger, and before the return journey was completed every man was racing back at the top of his speed.

T eir presence was indeed urgently needed. The Carlists stealing up through an orchard had got quite

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Drawn by] [*C. Lawson Wood.*

The Carlists got quite close to the village before their presence was discovered, and shot the sentries.

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close to the village before their presence was discovered. They shot the sentries, cut the picket who came to their assistance, to pieces, drove back with great loss a small column which General Evans dispatched to hold them in check till the main body arrived, not forgetting to kill all the wounded. These formalities gave time for the troops to get back. The First Regiment was told to storm the church-yard, which they did after losing over a hundred of their men as they crossed a field.

A little diary of the war, now out of print, describes how a city clerk, on seeing one of the generals fall, seized his sword, mounted his horse, and, calling for followers dashed right into the centre of the Carlists. The courage he displayed was so great that a rush was made for his rescue. He was got out of the throng but not before he had cut down four and shot two of his adversaries. Still for all the gallantry displayed by the First Regiment, the Carlists captured the village.

Towards the close of the day General Evans made a desperate effort to effect its recovery. The ground was rough, woody, and so much intersected with thick hedges than that in the neighbourhood of the churchyard, that the night was well advanced before the Legion succeeded in dislodging the foe. According to the aforesaid diary our men to cheer each other kept repeating during the fight "what will they say at home of us now."

The night was well advanced when the contending forces reached the open. The fight then underwent a most surprising change. The Carlists knew how to use the bayonet but the men lacked the weight and nerve of the soldiers composing the Legion, and were now driven forcibly back with great loss. The Carlists as they retired on Aize set fire to the houses in order to deprive the Legion of shelter.

The smoke and the darkness was now so great that the troops fell into confusion, one of the regiments pouring several volleys into another before the mistake was discovered. This so enraged the men that when the Carlists reappeared headed by some priests holding their crucifixes aloft to encourage their followers, the Legion charged with such fury that priests and crucifixes both disappeared.

As the months rolled on the Carlists grew to so respect the dogged valour of our men as to prefer night attacks to day, in order to obtain some advantage, so they would assail us a couple of hours before daybreak. To recover a height commanding the town of Pessages a large force of Carlists one night crept silently towards our lines. But the sentinel saw them.

Waiting till they were quite close, the watcher fired a couple of guns, heavily charged with canister shot, and blew the whole force, dead, wounded, and living, down the hill side. Those who escaped uninjured met their death a little later when the Legion got in amongst them.

After this, the story of the British Legion in Spain enters on a new stage. Although the credit for the victories won rested mainly with the Legion, the Queen's Government issued a proclamation thanking her brave army, and especially the intrepid Spanish sentinel who had fired the gun in the night attack just recorded.

This mendacity filled the Legion with rage, and after this they never gave the Spaniards a chance. When the Carlists came in sight they would bear down on them like a red deluge and send them flying in all directions. Losses they thought nothing of as long as they could humiliate the Spaniards and annoy their enemies in London, but all enthusiasm for the cause had long since vanished.

Jealous of the fame the Legion were acquiring as hard fighters, the Government now starved the Commissariat to such an extent, that it was no uncommon thing for the troops to be without food for forty-eight hours. Then the officers, to suppress the growing discontent, tried to flog the men into submission.

They had defeated the enemy with great loss and had marched through St. Sebastian, which they had previously lost with flags flying, and bands playing.

The townspeople cheered, and the officers complimented the men. There had been hints as to a banquet, but the reception ended with the cheering. Great, therefore, was their disgust on reaching camp that night, to find there was nothing to eat. For a month after this a day hardly passed without some men after fighting from morning to night against their untiring foes being flogged.

One evening, in 1837, the Legion broke out into open mutiny. Some six of the officers, who had incurred much unpopularity amongst the men, were stripped in place of six soldiers they had ordered to have the lash, and but for the order that Hernani was to be assaulted without a moment's delay they would all have been flogged.

Forgetting their wrongs the Legion at once started for Hernani; great, therefore, was their chargin to find on their arrival that the Carlists had evacuated the town. In fact, they were so annoyed that they looted the shops. They were told to restore what they had taken and refused. You can shoot one man but not 5,000. General Evans saw this, so after persuading a few of the malcontents to go to Hernani and destroy the works, he set himself to win back the confidence and obedience of the Legion. But he never succeeded.

The force showed much of its old spirit on March 16th, 1837, when the *élite* of the Carlist army, 16,000 strong, attacked them. All the success they achieved was to force the Legion, which did not number 8,000 men, back about half a mile. The General was pleased, but it was London they were thinking of when fighting, and not the cause of the Queen Regent and her babe.

General Evans may have lacked the qualities of a great general, or even a guerilla chief, but in none of his battles did he lose either guns, equipage, or prisoners, whilst he took from the enemy 100 officers, 1,000 men, 30 pieces of artillery, and scores of entrenched positions. His men thought him a good officer but any regard they felt was quite overborne by the hatred they had conceived for the Spaniards, friend and foe alike.

Finding that they could not beat us in battle, the Carlists poisoned the wells, as certain of the baser sort among the Boers wanted to poison the rivers of the Transvaal with cyanide of potassium, and, with the connivance of the tradespeople, the food also, playing at night the part of assassins.

In April, 1837, they captured a party of 127 of our men and thirteen officers. Our fellows could have cut their way through but surrendered because they were sick of the war. The moment they gave up their arms they were brutally massacred.

In May, 1837, General Evans returned to England. Shortly after, Colonel O'Connell, with a new Legion of 1,393 men landed in Spain. But as, mainly owing to our exertions, the Carlist spirit was broken, the Spaniards took such little pains to conciliate the new-comers that they disbanded in disgust.

By July, 1837, both Legions had ceased to exist. A few returned to this country, but the majority were never heard of again.

[Next week: "Marlborough's Campaigns. 1702-1710."]

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SHORT STORIES THAT MAKE YOU LAUGH.

The Prize of One Guinea for the best Storyette has been won this week by Miss E. WOOD, 14 Marywell, Arbroath, N.B.

The Pound Weight.

In a village in Warwickshire a labourer went into the general store, which was kept by an old dame, and asked for "a pound o' bacon."

The old lady cut some rashers, and laid them on to the scale, but looked round in vain for the pound weight.

"Oh, never mind!" said the customer, obligingly willing to help. "My fist weighs just a pound. I'll lay it in the scale."

The shopkeeper confidingly accepted this offer, and sliced away at the bacon, merely remarking that "it seemed to take her a good while to cut a pound!" Needless to say, our hero got good weight.

A few days later he called again at the store, and, in a friendly way inquired:

"Found yer weight, missus?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "very soon after you had gone."

"Well, now, you see if my fist don't weigh a pound," said he.

The pound weight was accordingly put into one scale and the man's fist in the other, and of course the balance was perfect.

"Well, I never seed anything so near in all my life!" exclaimed the old lady in astonishment. "Here, lad, here's a red herring for yer honesty."

"Do it Again!"

They had been sitting side by side, he and she, on the back seat of a travelling circus. During the interval he slipped out to get a drink. She had not noticed his absence.

Presently an elephant, stabled in the rear, pushed his trunk through an opening in the canvas, and putting his trunk round her waist gave her a squeeze.

She did not scream, or even turn her head, she simply sighed and softly said:

"Do it again, George, do it again."

A Smart Ruse.

Mr. M., a well-to-do bachelor, after dining one evening with the officers of the infantry detachment, whose barracks lay about a mile from his house, invited two of them to dine with him on the following Friday.

But Mr. M. had a bad memory, and the invitation he had given passed from his mind.

On the said Friday, returning from his afternoon ride, he saw the two officers in front of him walking towards his house.

Mr. M. at once recollected the invitation, and at the same moment became painfully conscious that he had told his housekeeper he would only require a couple of chops for dinner.

After a brief moment of despair Mr. M. cantered on, and overtaking his friends a few yards from his own gate he accosted them hurriedly:

"Good evening. Out for a stroll, I suppose. Don't forget that you dine with me this day week."

Then he cantered off, but that day week the two officers dined off the best of everything.

Once Bitten——

I was cycling along a country road at an easy pace when a tramp pretended to have been knocked down by me as I passed. Getting up again with an assumption of great physical suffering he demanded pecuniary compensation.

I was so indignant at the clumsy attempt to knock money out of me that I seized him and thumped him, shook him, kicked him, and finally flung him into a brook by the roadside.

He scrambled out and scurried away as fast as his aching limbs would let him.

An intensely amusing sequel happened a week later, when I really did accidently knock this same tramp down. Jumping off my machine I put it against the edge and ran back to apologise, but the man took to his heels, although I ran some distance after him, being really anxious to know whether I had hurt him, and ready—on this occasion—to give him monetary recompense.

But he must have thought that I believed that he had again only shammed being run over, and that I was bent on giving him another thrashing, for he ran like the wind.

The Boar.

Two Irishmen, finding themselves dead broke at the Christmas season, consulted each other as to how they could raise some funds for their holiday. They thought of plan after plan, till at last one of them suggested that they should raffle a pig. Accordingly, a form was drawn up as follows:

"To be raffled, on Christmas Eve, a fine Yorkshire boar, recently imported into the country. Sacrificed for ten chances at half-a-crown each. The list was taken round the village, and in a short time all the chances were sold. Soon, however, the dread 24th came and the men had to face the uncomfortable reality that it was the day of the raffle. Looking over the list, they selected the subscriber whom they believed to be the best-natured of the lot, and wrote to him as follows:

"Dear Sir,—We are happy to inform you that the raffle of the Yorkshire boar was held to-day, and that you are the fortunate winner. We hold the animal at your disposal, and shall be pleased to forward it as soon as you are prepared."

Early next morning, however, before the fortunate winner had fully realised his good luck, he was greeted with the following letter:

"Dear Sir,—We regret to inform you that the Yorkshire boar died at twelve o'clock last night. We do not know the exact cause of death; but, judging from the symptoms, we believe it to be either cholera or influenza. Owing to the existing sanitary regulations, the animal had to be buried without delay. We shall be glad to receive your cheque for ten shillings and sixpence, being the amount of funeral expenses incurred."

The fortunate winner did not remit the amount, but he thought it safe not to make any further inquiry about the pig.

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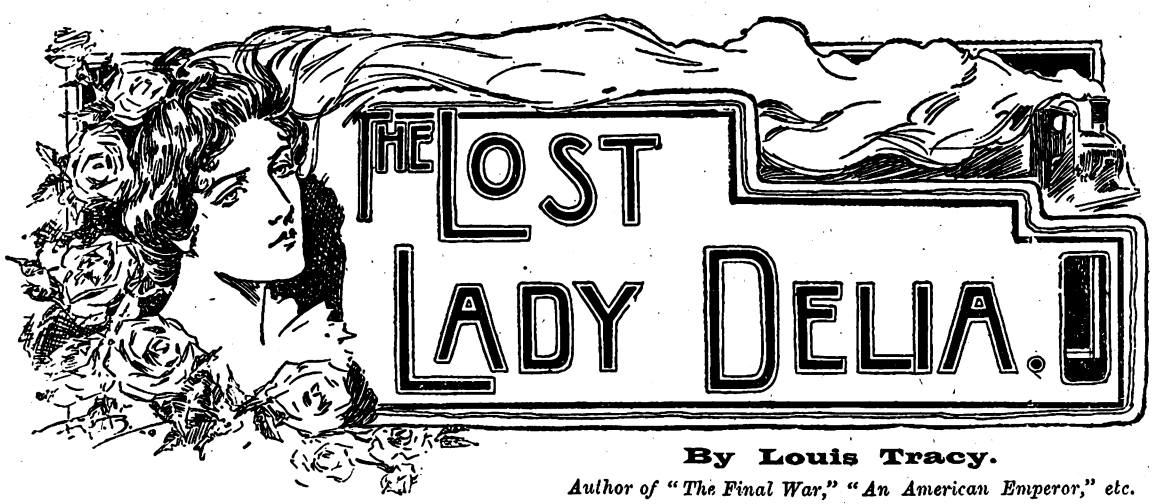

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

THIS TELLS THE STORY FROM THE START.

LADY DELIA LYLE leaves her house one foggy November afternoon, saying she is going to see her sister at Richmond, but from that time she is not heard of.

Her husband, Sir Charles Lyle, puts the matter into the hands of detectives, Inspector Winter taking charge of the case.

Reginald Brett, a barrister friend of the Lyles, also promises to do all he can, and he finds out that Lady Delia, on the night of her disappearance, instead of going to Richmond, alighted at Sloane Square, and went to a block of flats called Raleigh Mansions.

Towards the end of the month the body of a woman, evidently murdered, is found wedged beneath a drain-pipe in the Thames at Putney, and, though Sir Charles does not identify the body, Brett imagines it to be that of Lady Delia. Shortly after this discovery Lady Delia's maid, Jane Harding, disappears. She is afterwards found to have gone on the stage.

Brett now starts investigations at Raleigh Mansions, and he fixes on two residents there as being likely to have been connected with Lady Delia. These are a Mr. Sydney H. Pyne, who is not at present in residence, and a Mrs. Hillmer, whom he finds to be Pyne's sister.

It had transpired that Pyne had gone to Monte Carlo, and thither Brett goes, and he discovers that though letters are addressed to Pyne at the Hotel du Cercle he is not known there.

During his stay at Monte Carlo Brett becomes acquainted with an Englishman, named Albert Mensmore, whom he helps out of some money difficulties, but he does not discover anything about Pyne.

After his return Brett finds out that Sir Charles Lyle knows Albert Mensmore, but in what connection does not transpire.

A few days later Brett goes into the City, to the office of Dodge and Co., with whom he had had some speculative dealings, and from remarks made by Mr. Dodge, he thinks that Pyne and Mensmore must be one and the same man. In the evening Brett and Winter go to Raleigh Mansions and search the flat occupied by Pyne. Brett finds that a piece of one of the fire-dogs is missing, and that it exactly corresponds with the piece of iron which was found imbedded in the head of the body found at Putney.

He again visits Mrs. Hillmer, who is terrified by his inquiries, and this seems to strengthen suspicion against her brother.

CHAPTER XVII.

A POSSIBLE EXPLANATION.

BRETT had now several lines of inquiry open.

Apart from the main and vital question as to the exact method of Lady Delia's death, and the identity of the person responsible for it, a number of important matters required attention.

Why had Jane Harding quitted her situation so suddenly?

Whence did she obtain the money that enabled her to blossom forth as Marie le Marchant?

Who was Sydney H. Pyne?

Why did Mensmore adopt a false name; and, in any case, why adopt the name of Pyne?

Why did Mrs. Hillmer exhibit such sudden terror lest her brother might be guilty?

Whom did Mrs. Hillmer marry? Was her husband alive or dead?

Was the man who conveyed Lady Delia's body from Raleigh Mansions to Putney responsible also for her death?

Finally, why did he select that particular portion of the Thames banks for the bestowal of his terrible burthen?

Many other minor features suggested themselves for careful attention, but the barrister knew that if he elucidated some of the major questions the rest would answer themselves.

The last query promised to yield a good crop of information should it be satisfactorily dealt with. Turning to his notes he found that the former owner of the Putney house was a tutor or preparatory schoolmaster, named the Rev. Septimus Childe.

Could it be that this was the school in which both Sir Charles Lyle and Mensmore were fellow-students? If so, Brett failed to see why he should not forthwith place the whole of the facts in his possession at the service of the police, and allow the law to take its course.

On this supposition the case against Mensmore was very black; not, indeed, incapable of explanation—for circumstantial evidence occasionally plays strange pranks with logic—but of such a grave nature that no private individual would be justified in keeping his knowledge to himself.

Somehow, the deduction was disagreeable; Brett resolved to coerce his thoughts, and do that which was right, irrespective of consequences.

He did not possess a Clergy List, but could get one at his club. No letter came from Mrs. Hillmer, so he walked across the Park to Pall Mall to consult the appropriately-bound black and white volume, which gives reference to the many degrees of the Church of England.

Septimus Childe was a distinctive, though simple, name. But it was not there. There was not a Childe with a final "e" in the whole book. Without that important letter, as Brett's informant might be mistaken, there were several. Close scrutiny of each man's designation and duties convinced Brett that, though any of these might be one of the particular Child's children, none answered to the description of the gentlemen he sought.

Of course, he could always apply to Sir Charles Lyle, but he dreaded approaching the grief-stricken baronet on this matter. Now there was no help for it. The barrister was beginning to feel impatient at the constant difficulties which barred progress in each direction. After all, it was a small thing merely to ask his friend if he ever knew a reverend gentleman named Childe.

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Brett was sure that Sir Charles could not be acquainted with Mr. Childe, and also with the fact that the Putney house had served as his school, for it would be strange beyond credence if it were so that he had not mentioned it.

The weather was still clear and cold, and a wintry sun made walking pleasant. Brett, on quitting his club, set out again on foot. He crossed St. James's Square, Jermyn Street, and Piccadilly, and made his way to Oxford Street up New Bond Street.

Not often did he frequent these fashionable thoroughfares, and he had an excellent reason. When walking, he was given to abstraction, and seldom saw his acquaintances if he encountered them in unusual quarters. He would thus cut dead a woman at whose house he had dined the previous evening, or, when he was in practice at the Bar, fail to notice the salutation of his own leader.

To Reggie himself this shortcoming was intolerable; consciousness of it when in the West made him the most alert man in the crowd to note anybody whom he knew, except on the rare occasions when he forgot his failing.

This morning Bond Street was pleasantly full. People were beginning to return to town, as Parliament met in a few days, and Brett passed many who were on his visiting list.

Outside a well-known costumier's he saw a brougham, into which a lady had just been helped by the commissionaire.

It is no uncommon thing to recognise an acquaintance by the colour of his horse or the peculiar cut of his coachman's whiskers. This time Brett knew the driver as well as the equipage, but the lady inside was not Mrs. Hillmer.

Instantly he was at the door, with his hat lifted; he assumed an expression of polite regret as he saw Dobson, the maid, in her mistress's place.

"Sorry," he said. "I knew the carriage, and thought that Mrs. Hillmer was inside. She is well, I trust."

"Not very, sir," answered the maid with an angry pout.

"Indeed, what is the matter?"

"Madame is going away, and has put us all on board wages."

Dobson had some of the privileges of a companion, and resented this relegation to the servants' hall.

"Going away?" cried Brett. "A sudden decision, eh?"

The girl was arranging some parcels on the shelf in front of her. She was not disinclined for a conversation with this good-looking gentleman, so she smiled archly as she said: "Didn't you know, sir? I thought you would know all about it."

What he might have ascertained by a longer chat the barrister could not tell, for an interruption occurred. The coachman, more loyal to his mistress than the maid, said:

"Beg pardon, sir, but the missus told us to hurry;" and he whipped up his steed, to mingle with the passing stream of carriages.

"More complications," murmured Brett. "Mrs. Hillmer contemplates a bolt. Shall I pay her another visit and surprise her? No, confound it, I will not. Let her go, and let things take their course."

Not in the most amiable frame of mind at this discovery, he pursued his walk to Portman-square.

Sir Charles Lyle was at home. He always was, now.

"For goodness' sake, Mr. Brett," whispered Thompson, in the hall, "get Sir Charles to quit smokin', and readin', and thinkin'. He sits all day in the library and hardly has anythink to eat."

Reggie reproached himself for having neglected his resolution to stir his friend into something like animation. He was wondering what he should do in the matter, when the baronet rose at his entrance, saying, with a weary smile:

"Well, Brett, what news?"

The other suddenly decided to throw all questioning to the winds for the moment. "I have come," he cried, "to bring you out. I won't hear of a refusal. Let us walk to the club and have lunch and a game of billiards."

Sir Charles protested. He had slept badly and was tired.

"All the more reason that you should sleep well to-night. Come, now, be advised. You will allow yourself to become a hopeless invalid if you go on in this way."

Lyle unwillingly consented, and they left the house. The older man brightened up considerably amidst the bustle of the streets. His colour returned, he talked with some degree of cheerfulness, and even laughed as he said to Brett: "I never understood you were a doctor, Reggie, in addition to your other varied acquirements. For the first time since—since November last, I feel hungry."

"Why don't you take my advice, and go away for some shooting? It is not too late, even now, to go after a hare."

"I will think of it. I wonder who we shall meet at the club."

"Lots of fellows, no doubt. And, by the way, you must be prepared for one little difficulty. Suppose they ask for Lady Delia!"

The baronet's momentary gaiety vanished. He stopped short, and clutched Brett's arm. "Don't you see," he almost moaned, "that this is the reason I have kept indoors for so long? What shall I say?"

"You must make the best of it. Say, off-handedly, you don't know where she is—either with relations or in Italy. Anything will do, and it will create a false impression."

"I am sick of false impressions. I cannot do it."

"You must."

The stronger will prevailed, and they entered the doors of the Imperial, where, of course, Lyle was hailed at once by a dozen men.

"Hallo, Charlie! Been seedy?"

"Good gracious, Lyle! have you had influenza? I've missed you for months, now I come to think of it."

"I haven't seen your wife for quite a time. How is she?"

In the multitude of questions there was safety.

Sir Charles answered vaguely, and a chance arrival created a diversion by announcing that Royal Message had again broken down in his preparation for the Grand National.

Later in the afternoon the two found themselves ensconced in a quiet corner of the smoking-room. Brett seized the opportunity to get quickly over the interrogation.

"You told me," he said, "that Mensmore and you were at school together?"

"Did I?" said the baronet.

"Yes; don't you remember?"

"I get mixed up in thinking about things. But it is all right. We were"

"Whereabouts?"

"Oh, a private establishment kept by an old chap called Septimus Childe—Lucky Number was our nickname for him."

Brett betrayed no surprise at this startlingly simple statement. He said casually:

"I mean where was the school situated?"

"At Brighton in my time. But afterwards he shifted to some place nearer London—something to do with examinations, I fancy."

"But don't you know where?"

"How should I? I was at Sandhurst then. I believe the old boy is dead. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, it has something to do with the inquiry. I won't trouble you now with the details."

"Go on, I can stand it."

"But where is the good in paining you needlessly?"

"That stage has passed, old chap. My wife's memory has almost become a dream to me."

"Well, it is an extraordinary thing, but that place where

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—that house at Putney, you know, must have been the new school of the Rev. Septimus Childe."

"How did you learn that?"

"I have known it for months, ever since the inquest."

"And you did not tell me?"

"True, but at the time it seemed of no consequence. Now that Mensmore turns out to be a pupil of his, and probably passed the remainder of his early school days at that very establishment, the incident assumes a degree of importance."

Sir Charles looked earnestly at Brett as he put his next question: "Tell me, Reggie, do you seriously believe that Mensmore had anything to do with my wife's death?"

"I cannot honestly give you a satisfactory answer."

"But what do you think?"

"If you press me I will try to put my opinion into words. Mensmore was in some mysterious way associated with the crime; but the degree of association, and whether conscious or unconscious, I do not know."

"What do you mean by 'conscious or unconscious?'"

"I am sure that Lady Delia met her death in his residence; but it is impossible to say now if he was aware of her presence. He was in London at the time, that is quite certain."

"Do the police know all this?"

"No."

"I am glad of it. Mensmore did not kill my wife. The suggestion is absurd—wildly absurd."

"Things look black against him, nevertheless."

"I tell you it is nonsense. You are on the wrong track, Brett. What possible reason could he have to decoy my wife to his flat and there murder her?"

"None—perhaps."

"Then why do you hesitate to agree with me?"

"Because there is a woman in the case."

"Another woman?"

"Yes; Mensmore's sister, or half-sister, to be exact. She also lives in Raleigh Mansions."

"Indeed. So all kinds of things have been going on without my knowledge. Yet you promised faithfully to keep me informed of every incident that transpired."

"I am sorry Lyle; but you were so upset——"

"Upset, man. Don't you realise that this affair is all I have to think about in this world?"

The baronet was so disturbed that Reggie at once made up his mind to tell him as little as possible in the future. These constant possibilities of rupture between them must be avoided at all hazard.

To change the conversation he said: "Never mind, Lyle; this time you must pardon my inadvertence. How do Lady Delia's people bear the continued mystery of her disappearance?"

"At first they were awfully cut up. But lately they have been reconciled to her death, which they say must have resulted from accident, and that her identity must have been mixed up with that of some other person. Such things do happen, you know. Anyway, her sister has gone into mourning for her. You didn't know, I suppose, that I have made my little nephew my heir?"

"Was that step necessary at your time of life?"

"I shall never marry again, Brett."

"Well, let us drop the subject. You have done right as regards the boy under present circumstances; but, as a man of the world, I only point out that it is an unwise thing to bring up a youngster in expectation of something which chance might determine differently."

"Chance! There is no chance! My wife cannot return from the grave!"

"True. You have done right, no doubt. But the suddenness of the thing caused me to speak unwittingly."

They were silent a little while, when Sir Charles returned to the subject nearest his heart.

"Has your search developed in other directions?"

Brett fenced with the query. "To be candid," he said, "I am now most busily engaged in the not very difficult task of throwing dust in the eyes of the police. My motives are hardly definite to myself, but I do not want this unfortunate man, Mensmore, to be arrested until I have personally become convinced of his guilt."

"You are right, Brett. Your instinct seldom fails you. I question if he ever, to his own knowledge, saw my wife."

"Ah! You see you have hit upon my difficulty. Show me Lady Delia's reason for making that secret journey, and I will tell you how she met her death."

His concluding words sank to a murmur. An old friend of Lyle's had entered the room and came towards them.

A few minutes later Brett quitted the Imperial and drove to his chambers, where he found a note from the ticket-collector stating that Foxey's name was William Marsh.

The day was still young, and the barrister paid a visit to the West London Police Court, where the records soon revealed the conviction of the cab-driver and the period of his sentence.

"Let me see," said the resident inspector, "his time at Holloway is up on February 6th. That is a Monday, and as Sunday doesn't count, he will be liberated on the 4th, about 8 a.m. That is the habit, sir, in the matter of short sentences. If you want to see him when he leaves the gaol you can either wait at the gates or at the nearest public-house where the prisoners go for their first drink. They seldom or never miss."

Brett thanked the official and returned home.

He was on the point of going out to drive, when he received a letter from Sir Charles Lyle. It ran:

My dear Reggie,—To-day's experiences have impelled me to take this inevitable step of announcing my wife's death. Hence I have forwarded the inclosed notice to an advertisement agency, with instructions to insert it in the principal papers. I have also decided to follow your advice and leave town for a few days. I am going to Wensley, my place in Yorkshire, should you happen to want me.—Yours, Charles Lyle.

The notice read:

Lyle.—On November 6, Delia, wife of Sir Charles Lyle, suddenly, at London.

Next morning it figured in the obituary columns of many newspapers, as Brett, though taken aback by the rapidity of his friend's action, saw no reason to endeavour to stop him. In the words of the letter, it was "the inevitable step."

CHAPTER XVIII.

What Happened on the Riviera.

The *White Heather* swung quietly at her moorings in the harbour of Genoa the Superb. The lively company on board, tired with its day's sightseeing, had left the marble streets and palace cafés to the Genoese and sought the pleasant seclusion of the yacht's airy promenade deck.

"Dinner on board, followed by a dance," said Phyllis, as arbiter of the procedure. A few hasty invitations sent out to British residents in Genoa had met with general acceptance, and the lull between afternoon tea and the more formal meal was gratefully accepted by the hosts.

Genoa is so shut in by its amphitheatre of hills that unless a gale blows from the west, its bay is unruffled and its atmosphere oppressively hot during the day, even in the winter months.

Sir William Browne's excursion had proved so attractive to those invited that the *White Heather* was taken further along the coast than had been originally intended When all the best known resorts of the Riviera proper were exploited, some one, probably prompted thereto by Phyllis or Mensmore, suggested a run to Genoa.

They had been here three days, and on the morrow would hand the yacht over to the owner's agents, whilst those on board separated once more on their different routes. The Brownes went to Florence and Rome, and Mensmore was pretending to hold out against the pressing request to

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accompany them, given cordially to him by his prospective father-in-law.

This afternoon Phyllis and he were leaning over the taff-rail and discussing the point.

The young lady was slightly inclined to be angry. Her eyes roamed over the magnificent panorama of church-crowned hills and valleys of luxurious green, with the white city in front and the picturesque quays looking as though they had been specially decked for a painting by Clara Montalba. But Phyllis paid heed to none of these things. She wanted her lover to come with her and not to fly to smoke-covered London.

"Business!" she cried "it is always business that men think of. Of course I know that affairs need to be attended to, but now that everything is settled and we are quite happy, it is too bad of you to run away immediately."

"But, dearest——"

"There now, take your hand off my arm. You are not going to coax me into agreement. Just because you receive a horrid letter this morning you go and upset all the arrangements."

"Phyllis, listen to me. I——."

"You *shan't* go. I think it is mean of you to insist upon it when I am so urgent."

"I am not insisting. You might at least help me to settle matters; otherwise they will get terribly mixed."

"And you *will* stay?"

"What else can I do when you ask me?"

"Oh, you darling!"

This little quarrel was very delightful, and made them feel ever so much more in love than before; but it did not help Mensmore out of his difficulty.

"Let us see what Pyne really says," he remarked, ruefully taking a letter from his pocket.

"Am I to look too?"

"Of course. I have no secrets from you, little woman."

Phyllis nestled up close to him. This time she did not object to his hand resting on her shoulder, and together they read the following letter:—

"My Dear Bertie,—At last I am able to write to you definitely. The prospectors have struck it rich on our property, and I have sold two claims outright for 50,000 dollars. With this nest egg I am taking the girls to New York, and shall then start by the *Teutonic* for your side of the pond. I am due in Liverpool on February 4, so look out for me.—Yours ever, Sydney H. Pyne."

Both gazed thoughtfully at the document for a few moments before Phyllis said:

"Does that mean we shall be rich, Bertie?"

Her companion emphasised the gratification of the plural pronoun by a squeeze.

"I hope so, sweet."

"That will be very nice, won't it? I will marry you even if you have to take a place in father's office; but it will be so much better if we haven't to explain to him that we are poor after all."

Mensmore laughed. "It is not so bad as that in any case," he said. "This Springbok Mine speculation will probably turn out well, but I look to Wyoming to yield the best and most permanent results."

"Why is Mr. Pyne coming to London?"

"Because it is only in London that capital can be obtained for large undertakings, and if the Wyoming Goldfield is really a valuable one we may be able to realise some portion of our interests for a considerable sum. Anyhow, he wants to consult me."

"Do you both own the ranch?"

"Yes; it was a joint transaction, but I found the money."

"And why did you come away?"

"Well, let me see. We made very little out of it, Phil, and as Pyne had two sisters, I thought it best to leave what there was for him. He was absurdly grateful about what he called my generosity in the matter, but now that the land has proved so valuable, of course all that nonsense is at an end, and we go half-shares in the deal."

"Two sisters! Were they pretty?"

"What? Jealous already! They are very nice, but much older than their brother and he is my senior by two years."

Miss Browne was graciously pleased to accept this explanation. She knitted her smooth brow into a reflective frown as she said:

"Mr. Pyne arrives on the 4th. It is now January 30th. You ought really to go home, Bertie."

"Now my dear sensible little woman is talking like her own self."

"Well, if you must I give you permission. But I did hope we should see Florence together."

"So we shall. I'll tell you what I will do. I will write to Pyne to-day, care of the steamer at Liverpool, tell him to go to my flat, and stay there a few days until I arrive, and go home myself at the end of next week. He is sure to spend some time in seeing the sights before tackling business, and he can do that as well without me as if I were there. A line to my old housekeeper, who has a spare key, will make the place habitable for him. Happy thought, I'll do it."

"And another happy thought! I'll come and watch you do it," cried Phyllis.

She did not notice that Mensmore's face clouded at this otherwise pleasant intimation. Nevertheless, he raced off with her to the saloon and seated himself at the writing-table. But before he placed pen to paper, Phyllis bending over him meanwhile, he suddenly exclaimed, in a tone of annoyance:

"Now, what a bore this is. I don't know how to address the letter to make sure of reaching him at once, and it is very important that it should not miss him."

"Father will know. Let's ask him."

"No," said Mensmore judicially. "I will row across the harbour to the Florio-Rubattino office, find out the exact thing, and send off the letter. Back in half-an-hour. Be good!"

And before Phyllis could argue the matter he was at the gangway shouting for a boat.

She blew a kiss at him as he shot over the narrow strip of water inside the mole, and little realised that Mensmore was saying to himself: "That was a narrow squeak. Never again, as long as I live, will I take another man's name. It causes no end of bother, and at the most unexpected moments."

He did not trouble the Florio-Rubattino people, as he well knew that a letter addressed to the White Star offices would insure any communication reaching his friend.

The context of the missive, as finally indited at the post-office explains his hesitancy to write it in the presence of his *fiancée*.

My dear Pyne,—Your good news is more than surprising. Although I believe you, I cannot yet grasp its full significance. However, let us leave explanations until we meet. I am fixed here for a few days more, as I have just become engaged to the sweetest girl in the world, but will return home at the end of next week. Meanwhile, I want you to take up your residence at my flat, No. 12, Raleigh Mansions, Sloane Square, where my housekeeper has instructions to receive you. Do not be surprised if you find the name of Pyne familiar there. Indeed, I took the place in your name in August last. However, all explanations when we meet.—Yours ever, Bertie Mensmore.

This, with a note to the housekeeper, Mrs. Robinson, and another to the hall-porter of the Universities Club, in case by any chance the Liverpool letter missed his friend, completed his task.

He laughed as he hurried from the post-office to the harbour.

"By Jove!" he said to himself, "won't old mother Robinson be surprised when she gets my letter telling her that another Mr. Pyne is coming from America, and that my name, concealed for family reasons, is Mensmore. I guess that Syd. will feel a bit mixed up, too, until I tell him the whole yarn."

No wonder his housekeeper would fail to understand him.

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Others, whose influence on his fortunes he little suspected were already puzzled by the circumstances. Brett, for instance, and Winter would have been very glad if some occult power enabled them to read the seemingly trivial letter posted that day in Genoa.

Every person known to the reader, and not the least the visitor from the United States, was on the eve of a mad whirl of events, the outcome of which no man could prophesy, but as yet one only, Reginald Brett, had the slightest suspicion that affairs were approaching a crisis.

When Mensmore reached the *White Heather* he found Lady Browne and Phyllis dressed for a drive before dinner. Sir William seized the opportunity to cross-examine his daughter's suitor as to his means. Phyllis was an only child, and her father did not propose that she should want, whatever the financial position of her husband might be. He liked Mensmore, and had ascertained by private inquiries that his social position was good.

"His father was a Major-General," said his informant, "but he lost his savings by speculation, and was unable to maintain his son in a crack cavalry corps, so the youngster resigned and went to America to try and better himself. There was a daughter, too, by the first wife, a very charming woman, who, when the crash came, was supposed to have gone on the stage. But I have never heard of her since."

So far the credentials were not bad; but Sir William thought it his duty to ascertain definite particulars.

Mensmore was quite candid with him.

"I have been somewhat of a rolling stone," he said, "but I am glad to believe that people have never had cause to think ill of me. At times my affairs have been at a desperate stage, but I hope such periods have passed for ever. I have already spoken to you about the Springbok Mine——"

The old gentleman nodded.

"Well, this morning I have received very satisfactory news from America," and he handed over Pyne's letter for perusal.

"Yes," said Sir William. "These things promise well. We will look into them when we reach England. Meanwhile I give my provisional sanction to my daughter's engagement. She is a good girl, Mensmore. She will be a true and excellent wife. I think you are worthy of her, and I hope that whatever clouds may have darkened your life will now pass away. You two ought to be happy."

"We will, sir," said Mensmore fervently.

"By the way, where is your sister? Is she in England or abroad?"

Mensmore had been expecting this question. He was prepared for it. "Mrs. Hillmer is my half-sister," he explained. "I have not seen much of her since—since an unhappy marriage she contracted some years ago."

"Indeed. Is her husband alive?"

"I can hardly tell you. I believe so. But she does not live with him. She is well provided for, but it was partly on account of this matter that I came to the Riviera for the winter. To tell the truth, I quarrelled with her about it."

"Ah, well. Her troubles need not affect Phyllis and you, except to give you warning. And take my advice. Never interfere between husband and wife. However good your motive ill is sure to come of it."

In the growing dusk Sir William Browne did not note the embarrassment of his companion in discussing this topic. Mensmore was essentially an honourable man, and he detested the necessity which forced him to permit false inferences to be drawn from his words. Yet there could be no help for it. He was compelled to suffer for the faults of another.

It was a relief to him when the dressing bell for dinner allowed him to escape to his cabin.

(To be continued.)

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MY MURDER: A CONFESSION.

I.

THOUGH I am willing to record fully how and why I committed it, I decline to do more than indicate the place of the deed. Those who can recognise it by the clue I give, are at liberty to put two and two together.

Most people who have been to Switzerland will understand where the hotel of Les Trois Sages is situated. They will know that it is the chief hostelry of the large town at which the majority of tourists entering and returning from the region of the Alps usually halt, at least for a night, as from it diverge the main channels leading to the choicest scenery of the little republic.

They will recollect that the inn is charmingly placed on the banks of the Rhine, and that its balconies and windows look out upon and absolutely overhang the rushing river, not a hundred miles from its falls at Schaffhausen. Enough, then, as to the locality; now, as to my coming there, and what happened.

The superfluous energy of a Briton six-and-twenty years of age, six feet two in height, and strong in proportion, finds no better outlet than scrambling over peaks, passes, and glaciers; and I had been doing this, on the occasion of which I write, to my heart's content, for five or six weeks.

It was not my first experience of the Alps by many; but it had, on the whole, been the least enjoyable: the companion who was going with me disappointed me at the eleventh hour, and I started alone, the limited time for my outing not brooking delay; and though at times I fell in with pleasant people, I was bored by my solitude.

My temper too, always a peppery one at the best, was considerably ruffled by the loss, towards the end of my journey, of my remaining circular notes. I most stupidly flicked the little case containing them out of my breast-pocket with my handkerchief as I was leaning over the side of the steamer coming down from Flueln to Lucerne, and I had the mortification of seeing it sink into the blue lake before my very eyes.

My remaining cash was only just sufficient to carry me to—well, say Les Trois Sages— so immediately on reaching Lucerne I had to write home for more money, directing that it should await me at the aforesaid well-known hotel. I therefore timed my arrival there accordingly and it was not an hour too soon, for I could only just avoid over-staying my leave by starting for Paris by the first train the next day.

Hence it was with no little anxiety that on reaching my inn I demanded of the *concierge* whether there was any letter for me, and my satisfaction was so great when that majestic functionary handed me one, that I tore it open then and there, displaying the nature of its contents to the throng of waiters, porters, and idlers usually hanging about hotel halls.

It being late I was soon shown to my room—a luxurious one, for an alcove, where stood the bed, was divided from the *salon* by a heavy *portière*, thus making two apartments. I took little heed, however, of these vanities at the time. I was to be off early next morning, and ere long I was in bed and my light out. The loss of the money tended to make me unusually careful of that which I had just received; so, though I left my watch, etc. on the table in the *salon*, I laid the packet of notes on the little marble stand at the bed-head; and it was lucky I did so.

* * * * *

Sound asleep! Sound is not the word for it. Dead asleep would be nearer the mark; that sort of sleep which comes to a strong man in perfect health and training, after a fatiguing day's journey. What it was that aroused me from it I shall never clearly understand; but my belief is, that it was an instinct rather than a noise which caused me, without altogether returning to consciousness, to open my eyes.

My face was turned away from the wall against one side of which the bed stood, so that I looked straight across the little alcove, and through the half drawn *portière* into the *salon*.

The moon must have risen, for there was a much stronger light in the rooms than when I put out the candle, and a deep shadow was cast across the opening between them. Her rays thus flooded both apartments by the single window in each.

Now I was in that curious state that although I knew that I was awake I thought I was dreaming, in fact, I was just on that mysterious frontier-land between the two states, which is not the least perplexing amongst the phenomena of a mortal existence—that is to say, I thought I was dreaming—when I saw, on first opening my eyes, the figure of a man on all-fours, crawling out of the stream of moonlight in the *salon* into the shadow cast, as I have said, by the arch and heavy folds of the *portière*.

But I knew I was awake when, losing sight of him for a minute there, I saw him again emerging into the rays of light which fell across the floor of the alcove where I lay. I knew, I say, that I was awake now, for could I not distinguish plainly, as he came very slowly and stealthily towards the bed, that his face was hidden by a sort of crape mask? And yet still, for a moment more, I thought I must be dreaming. I had never moved or raised my head from the pillow; I had simply opened my eyes, and I still abstained from movement whilst endeavouring to realise in what condition I was.

Suddenly, however, all doubt disappeared. I took in on the instant the fact that this was an attempt at robbery, perhaps worse, for, approaching the little table at the bed-head, the figure, without rising from the floor, lifted one of its hands as if to reach the marble top. The man was within arm's length of me now, and without giving him the slightest warning by any preliminary movement, I endeavoured to spring out of bed straight upon him. For a second I had him by the collar; but not being able to get clear altogether from

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the bed-clothes I was checked, and he slipped out of my grasp like an eel, and disappeared in the shadow.

Instantly, however, I was on my feet; but thinking that the fellow probably would be armed I did not attempt to grope for him, but made straight through to the door of the *salon* giving on to the landing, intending to raise an alarm and prevent an escape, but before I could draw the bolt I saw him at the window opening on to the balcony. His figure came dark between me and the moonlight, and judging that, as the casement was open, he must have entered that way, and was now endeavouring to get out by it, I once more sprang towards him, and had him in my arms just as he stepped on to the balcony, and was in the act of climbing over it. He struggled for a moment or two desperately, of course; but my hot temper was up now, and thinking of nothing but the insolent audacity of the intrusion and the attempted robbery, I tore him away with great violence—for he was but like a child in his strength as compared to me—and saying in my fury, "Ho, ho, you scoundrel! you want to get out this way, do you? then, by George, you shall go!" I flung him, as if he had been a truss of straw, over the balcony into—good God! the rushing river below!

* * * * *

Then, and then only, for the first time, as my hands quitted hold of him, did I remember the situation of my rooms. I had been sleeping in different ones almost every night for the last six weeks, and in the suddenness and rapidity with which the whole of the incidents had happened I entirely forgot that below the balcony rushed the impetuous Rhine. Lightning does not express the swift keenness of the agony which shot through my brain, as glaring after the wretched man, I caught a faint glimpse of his falling figure, and heard the faintest cry and splash rise for a second above the rush of the torrent.

Not being skilled in describing sensations I abstain entirely from attempting to express what mine were now. I pulled myself together in a minute or two, endeavouring to collect my thoughts, and to settle what I ought to do. I walked to the table where I had left my watch—it was gone; to the little stand at the bed-head—my packet of notes were safe, but the hand which I had arrested, only just in time, as it rose towards them belonged to someone who knew that they were there, that was evident. Then my eye fell upon a black object lying on the floor in a streak of moonlight; it was a piece of folded crape with an elastic band attached. In the first encounter the thief's disguise had fallen off—here it was!—and I remembered that for a second on the balcony I had met the rascal's large dark eyes as they seemed starting from his head with terror.

The balcony! As I put my hand on the side of the balustrade, in the act of looking over, it touched the top of a light ladder, the other end of which, on examination I could now faintly discern, in the moonlight, rested not a dozen feet down on a long but less projecting balcony *entresol* to which this lower balcony belonged.

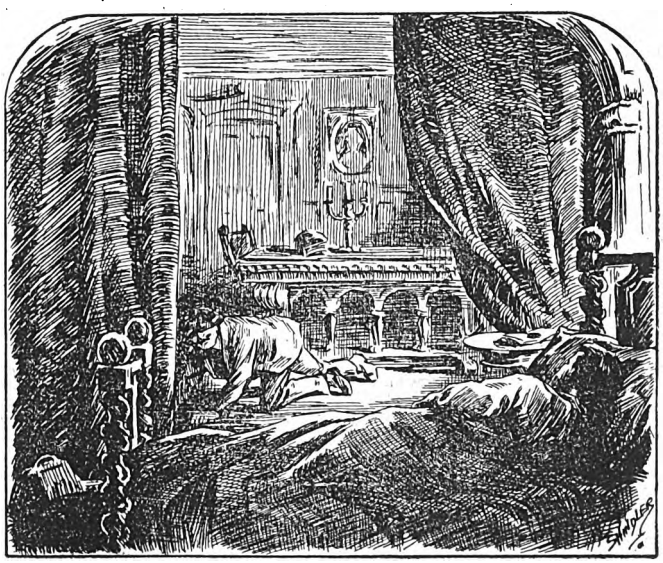
Clearly then, it was someone engaged about the house—a waiter probably—who had attempted to rob me; one of those who had seen me open my letter and examine the notes. I bethought me also, then, that my movements in my room must have been watched, or that stealthy hand would never have been raised with such fore-knowledge towards the spot where I had placed the money.

A long acquaintance with foreign habits had taught me that an amiable custom prevailed among this rascally scum of waiters of boring gimlet holes in the corners of the door panels, through which they might have become acquainted with the private proceedings of the occupants of the rooms, male or female.

I was not surprised, therefore, on rekindling my candle and examining my door, to find several of these *trous-judas*, as they were playfully called; one particularly so large and so directed, that anybody in the outer passage could easily observe all that went on within the room.

My impulse now was to raise an alarm; but an instant's reflection showed me that if I did I must bid good-bye to all thoughts of reaching Paris by the early train, and of saving the limit of my leave. And was it worth my while to do this? I decided in a moment—most certainly not.

Was I to expose myself to vast personal inconvenience and possible professional ruin, through not meeting my engagements, simply for the sake of explaining to the cumbersome law of the land what had happened, and to run the risk of not being able to do so to its satisfaction, and consequently perhaps of being incarcerated as a murderer? Not a bit of it. I would see the law of Switzerland at Jericho first! As it was, I had lost my watch, and my temper leapt up in rebellion at the thought, and easily persuaded me for the time that I should be little better than a fool to risk the prospects of my life by any act so quixotic. If the rascal were drowned, it was his own fault, and there should be an end of it, as far as I was concerned. So, at least, I thought then. No; I would be off as I proposed; and with this determination I began deliberately to dress



I saw the figure of a man on all fours crawling into the shadow.

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and pack my knapsack, for sleep was gone for that night. Only one doubt perplexed me. Should I leave the ladder standing where it was, and let the hotel authorities think what they liked, or (for otherwise it would only lead to inquiries and difficulties) should I fling it into the river after the man? Right or wrong, with very little hesitation I adopted the latter course.

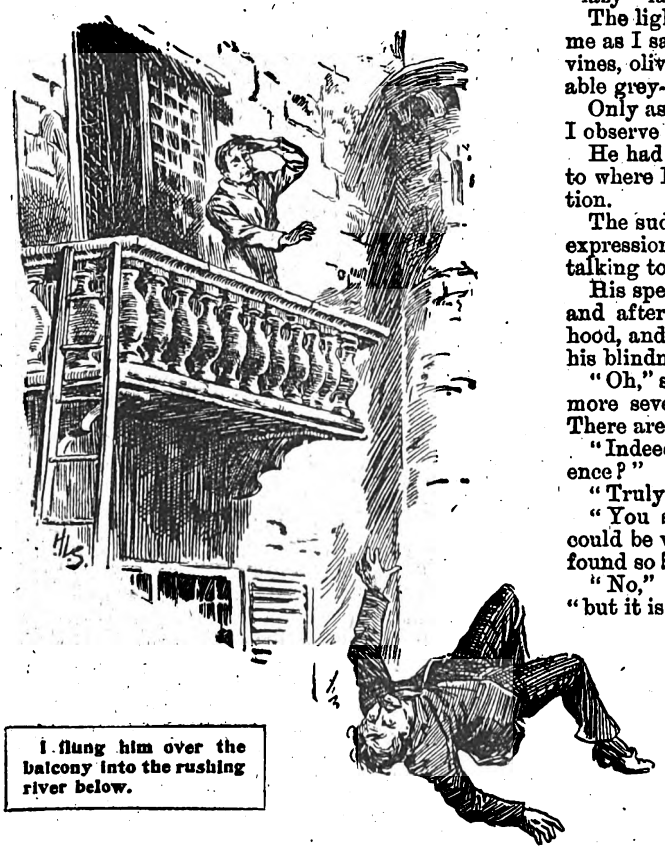
Not a sign of life was visible as I looked once more out upon the broad river; and as I gently raised the ladder, and consigned it to its depths, I thought it was not the first secret by a good many that its impetuous current had carried away into oblivion.

An hour or two later I had quietly paid my bill at the bureau, and was on my way to Paris, and by the following night was once more in my chambers in the Temple.

II.

Argue, reason, justify, talk about self-defence, and if I hadn't done this, he would have done so-and-so, as much as you please, you can never quite philosophise away the very disagreeable sensation which will arise occasionally if you have ever had the misfortune, however unintentionally, to kill a man.

My hot temper has often given me cause for regret, not



I flung him over the balcony into the rushing river below.

to say remorse; but since the night when I flung the robber into the Rhine I can safely say I have curbed it.

Whenever it comes bubbling up, there also comes with it the vivid recollection of that brief struggle on the balcony, and lo! it is subdued on the instant; but the recollection, alas, is not so speedily dismissed; it still hovers painfully in my memory at times, though twelve years have passed since the deed was done—twelve years! during which no mention, that I have ever seen, has been made in the papers of anyone having been missed from the hotel.

Of course I have been often to Switzerland since, but somehow I have always avoided the town where stands the hostelry of Les Trois Sages, and I should never think of going up the Rhine again.

I strike the Alps now by other routes, and have a tendency to get well to the Ital an side of them. Indeed I have lately returned from a saunter amongst the hills in the neighbourhood of Como.

What capricious fate led me there to the spot where I was to find the sequel to "My Murder" need not be speculated upon; it was one of those strange coincidences, I suppose, which when met with in fiction excite little surprise, but when stated as facts are generally doubted. Here it is, however, and if it had not been a fact there would never have been any record on paper of "My Murder."

Well, I pulled up one day at an unpretentious little albergo, on the side of a steep declivity overlooking the "lazy" lake.

The light refreshment which I ordered was brought to me as I sat at a little table in the garden, sheltered by vines, olive, and fig-trees, by the padrone himself a venerable grey-bearded man.

Only as he set the fruit and bread down before me did I observe he was blind.

He had walked so steadily and direct from the house to where I sat that no one could have guessed at his affliction.

The sudden discovery of it, together with a sorrowful expression which his face wore, touched me, and I began talking to him with what Italian I could muster.

His speech showed him to be above the common herd and after conversing for a while about the neighbourhood, and such ordinary topics, I ventured to touch on his blindness.

"Oh," said he, "that is very little, signor; men can be more severely tried than by having to live in the dark. There are worse afflictions than that."

"Indeed," I answered; "do you speak from experience?"

"Truly, signor, I do."

"You surprise me; I should have thought nothing could be worse. Do you mind telling me what you have found so?"

"No," he said, slowly sitting down opposite to me; "but it is a sad tale, I doubt if it can amuse the signor; but, if he is willing to listen, I am willing to tell. It sometimes eases the heart to pour out its troubles even into the ear of a stranger. But stay, let us know how the time goes, for I have some affairs to attend to by and by."

Whilst speaking he thrust a hand into the pocket of his vest, and, drawing out a watch without a chain, held it towards me, adding:

"What is the hour, signor? we blind folk are a little helpless in these matters."

I looked into his large brown palm and was about to answer, but the words stuck in my throat, for surely it was not the first time I had seen that dial.

"Permit me," I said after a pause, as, pretending not to be able to quite able to see it, I endeavoured to turn the watch over in his hand that I might by a glance at

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the back of it verify the idea which had crossed my mind.

He felt what I was doing, and said:

"The signor will find the time by the front, and not the back."

I was about to answer, but the words stuck in my throat.

"Surely," I answered; "it is three o'clock. But that is an English watch you have, is it not?"

"The signor is curious; can it signify to him of what manufacture it is?" replied the padrone, in rather an altered tone, but not rudely.

"Oh, no," I answered carelessly, not wishing to arouse any suspicions in him; "it only struck me as strange to find an English watch in these parts. Pray let me look at it."

With a return of his former sorrowful manner, and with an air of resignation, he reluctantly handed me his watch, saying:

"Certainly, if I tell you one thing I may as well tell you all."

A glimpse of the back revealed my own crest and initials; but I restrained the expression rising to my lips, and went on, "Ah, a good watch; may I ask how you came by it?"

"Yes, it will appear in what I have to say; it is all sad, and is only one of the many troubles which made me an old man before my time. Very sad indeed is all that hangs about that watch. It belonged to my son, my only son; at least it was found upon him when he was dead."

Needless to say how I winced under the old man's words. He continued, as he passed a hand across his sightless eyes.

"Yes, signor, he is dead these many years past, and perhaps it is as well. But, ah me! the way of it—there is my grief. Could it have been that I had been by, and have known that there was ever so little repentance in his heart, there would have been some little comfort for me, perhaps; but, as it was, it is too probable that he went unshriven, unrepentant, suddenly to his account."

"Tell me, tell me," I said quickly, "the way of his death!" But the padrone was not to be hurried. He seemed to like to linger on the pain his slowly-uttered words brought with them, little guessing how they were paining me also.

He went on: "Ever a prodigal from his youth upward, my boy grew worse and worse as he reached manhood. I had looked that he should inherit my business and good name, for they were both worth inheriting at one time. I kept an hotel at Bergamo, and for a while he was my chief waiter, but his vicious courses brought ruin on us both. He contracted debts which I had to pay; ran away in evil company, and I heard nothing of him for years.

"When I did it was, as usual, with a demand for money. He was then in Switzerland as a waiter, I believe, at the hotel of Les Trois Sages—the signor knows it, of course, all the English know it—and there, I afterwards heard, it was that he, in the act probably attempting some desperate crime, fell one night into the Rhine, and was picked up dead as appeared.

"Only by a miracle could it have been that his body was not carried straight away down over the falls at Schaffhausen but it seems that he got entangled with the chain of the ferry which crosses the Rhine, as you know, a little below the hotel.

"Here again, by a miracle, it chanced that he was seen by some men who were early working at some timber rafts, and was by them carried ashore, as I have said, for dead!"

"But was he?" I inquired, with an anxiety I could ill disguise, as the old man paused.

"No, signor; it was not his destiny to be drowned—would that it had been, for then he would have been saved from the commission of his greatest crime! No; he was restored, to return to me and pile upon me further anguish.

"He came back to Bergamo a year or two after to a smaller inn, which I was then keeping, and in a drunken brawl with some of his loose companions he used his knife with a fatal result upon an unarmed man, whose friend on the instant stabbed my son to the heart! That is all, signor; but the remembrance of his career has been far worse for me than the darkness."

"And the watch," I suggested, with a sense of relief quite inexpressible, "was found in his possession?"

"Yes, signor; but I doubt if he had come by it honestly, for they tell me there are a device and letters on the back in no way belonging to him. But still I treasure it for his sake, or rather for his mother's, for he was all that remained to me of her, and she idolised him for the five years that she was spared after his birth; and," added the old man, in a somewhat more cheery tone, as if the recital of his troubles had relieved him, "a good English watch is useful even to a blind man."

Most assuredly the last thing in my thoughts was to deprive him of his treasure. I was only too well repaid for my loss by what I had just heard; only too grateful for being able, after all, even to look back with complacency upon what I nevertheless still call "My Murder!"

W. W. Fenn.

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THE CURATE'S LAST HALF-CROWN.

I WAS a poor curate residing down in the country.

Those were the old days of pluralism, and my rector was a great pluralist. He had two canonries, two rectories, a vicarage, a prebendal stall, a snug office in an ecclesiastical court, and an archdeaconry.

It was quite obvious that he could not inhabit all his houses at the same time, and so he graciously allowed me the use of his vicarage house, deducting something from my stipend; but, let it be said to his credit, not so much as he could legally have done on his own account.

He would come down to Cherrington, so called, perhaps, on account of the abundant cherry-orchards in our district, once a year, when he preached the village-club sermon and looked after his tithes.

Of course I married. It seems the destiny of the impecunious curate—what they must all come to. A bachelor curate would have very little chance among the cherry-cheeked maidens of Cherrington, all ripe, with delicate white and glowing red.

Farmer Dawson, the churchwarden for our parish, gloried in the singularity of having only one curate, and was very friendly and neighbourly. I used to turn in on a Sunday afternoon, for evening services at that time were hardly known in country places, and used to smoke a pipe with the farmer, and partake of his home-made wine and home brewed ale, until Mary called us in to tea.

Mary and I married—a very obvious course—and the six little ones came on with all the regularity of the cherry season. My father-in-law said that he should leave Mary fifteen hundred pounds when he died, and in the meantime allow us the interest.

I became very much attached to my work, and very fond of the house and noble grounds; indeed, our vicarage grounds were quite famous in our part of the country. At the same time I felt that it was the warm nest on a tottering bough. I was not my own master and every curate has an insane idea that he would like to be his own master; whereas, after my own experience, I can say that it is much easier and happier to be ruled than to rule, and in all my preferments I never was happier than in my first humble curacy. But I am anticipating. Here was I dreading the breaking of the bough, when that breaking of the bough in a kindly Providence was to bring some very strange things about.

There were two ways in which my bough might incontinently break. The curacy being an unusually snug one, the Rev. Dr. Jennifer might chose to eject me and appoint some private friend of his own. But, to do him justice, he was a quiet easy-going man. His own lines had fallen to him in snug, pleasant places, and he would not like to inflict hard lines upon any man. But there was the chance that, having had so many good things, he might cap them all by taking a bishopric, which would necessarily vacate all his appointments. There was also the chance that he might shuffle off this mortal coil, albeit tenderly attached to the mortal coil, and much nourishing and cherishing it. I should say that the bishop of our own diocese had local ties which brought him very much into our neighbourhood. Dr. Jennifer considered himself quite as good a man as our bishop, and I believe in point of income was the better man of the two. These were days before the administration of Church funds by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners was commenced.

Some of the bishops had immense revenues under the old arrangement, whereas others were much poorer than under the present equalised arrangements. Among these latter was our own bishop. He had one or two farms in our parish.

All the society in our own neighbourhood was made up of farmers; we had no estated gentlemen, that is to say, the bishop owned a small tract, and all the rest belonged to a great duke, whose castle was twenty miles away, and owned all the land between us and the castle.

Our bishop was comparatively poor, and made himself poorer than he need be. He never took fines and rack-rents; he granted leases, he improved the Church property, he maintained schools; he bore cheerfully even more than his share of the burdens upon land, that land which seems to me to be always grievously burdened.

So when the good bishop came down to these parts, which was pretty often, he would sometimes turn aside for a night or two at the vicarage, when he would romp with the little ones and talk with me about the Greek poets over a pipe and some of my father-in-law's home-brewed in the evening.

The very reverend vicar, an archdeacon of Archdeacon Grantley's own stamp, died suddenly of gout in the stomach. It was rather unhandsome of the gout, which generally troubles fingers and toes before making a sudden final descent upon such a very vital region.

Of Dr. Jennifer's numerous appointments, the vicarage of Cherrington was in the gift of the Lord Chancellor. Ordinarily, Chancellor's livings are not very good; but this was one of the best, being between four and five hundred, so I should have about as much chance of getting the living by applying for it as of going to the moon in a balloon.

But for all that I made up my mind that I would apply for it, and thought that now was the time when my happy friendship with the bishop might stand me in good stead.

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It so fortunately happened that a few hours later the bishop, riding by on his cob to visit one of his farms, drew up to talk about the news which the morning's post had brought respecting this lamented demise.

"I am very sorry," said the good bishop when he had patiently listened to the story of my pains and expectations, "but I am afraid, though you may not think so, that I am the last man able to do you any good. I never asked a favour of any man; and if I did so, I do not think that my asking would have the slightest weight with the Lord Chancellor."

"I confess, my lord," I said, "that I had ventured to count upon your influence."

"But I have no influence, my dear Mr. Vavasour," said the bishop. "I have never given a party support to this Government or any Government, I go to London as little as I can, and am always glad to get out of it as soon as I can. Some of my episcopal brethren get little notes from the Treasury asking them to be in their places at certain times, or to use their influence with certain people. The Treasury never think it worth their while to send any little notes to me."

I could not help smiling at the engaging frankness of my worthy diocesan.

Evidently my poor bough had broken down altogether. It was not to be bound up by any care of mine.

"There is just one thing that I can do for you, Vavasour," said the bishop kind-heartedly, "without the least impropriety. I cannot ask him to give you the living, but I will write a few lines which you can show at any time to the Chancellor, or anyone else you choose."

The worthy bishop dismounted, and entering the study wrote a few lines, in which he stated, to my grateful confusion, that I was a good scholar, and had worked my parish admirably.

"And if I can ever do anything for you, of course I will," he added. "But you are still quite a young man, and there are worthy men who have grown grey in the diocese who have a first claim on me."

I discussed matters with my wife. My fix was really a terrible one. An incoming vicar could eject me in six weeks. So good a curacy might not be obtainable for years; and, indeed, I might not be able to obtain any curacy at all precisely at the moment I wanted it.

It was hoping against hope; but still this journey must be made. It was fifty miles off; but Farmer Dawson would take me over in his gig until I should meet a railway—a new-fangled invention betokening the end of the world, as was thought at Cherrington, and only then coming into use.

It was a long journey in those days; but I started at early dawn in order that, if possible, I might see the Lord Chancellor the same day.

Tea and candles were not procurable in our village—that is to say, of any degree of excellence—and I was to buy them in London.

Also I had a mysterious mission—to call at certain shops and get some gorgeous articles of attire for baby, with which she was to petrify the local mind on the forthcoming occasion of her being christened. I was to attend to these things—so ran the wife's instructions—the very first thing of all, so that I might make sure of them.

I verily believe that she considered the matter of a living as being of quite inferior importance to the matter of baby's hood and bonnet.

By these means my little stock of money, quite inconsiderable at first, grew "small by degrees, and beautifully less."

Emptying it out of my pockets and examining it just before I set out to leave my card upon the Chancellor, I found that it was reduced to a single half-crown and a few smaller coins, which might possibly bring me home again, after making allowance for a crust of bread-and-cheese and a glass of beer.

I duly turned the coins over and—shall I confess it?—spat upon them for luck's sake, according to a legend which I had inherited from my ancestors, and set off to make the acquaintance in a friendly way of his lordship the Chancellor.

But, like Bob Acres, my courage was imperceptibly oozing out of my toes as I drew near the big silent house where the great man kept the King's conscience in his bag.

Putting on a very painful expression of appearing to be entirely at ease, I ascended the steps and made a courageous imitation of an aristocratic double-knock.

"Is the Lord Chancellor at home?" I inquired of a bloated specimen of a British flunkey, who made his appearance.

"His lordship is not at home," answered the man, with just a suspicion of impudence in his voice.

"Can you tell me when he will be at home?"

"No, I can't," said the man, in a tone that convinced me of its insincerity, and he was evidently preparing to bang the door in my face, or something very like it.

Now I had heard in my time of the virtues of palm-oil. The human hand being lubricated with a composition of silver becomes tender and mollified. To use plainer terms, it occurred to me that it might be a useful thing to bribe the British flunkey.

But then arose the question of the wherewithal to bribe him. I had but my half-crown, my solitary coin of weight, my little all, my beautiful, my last. If I parted with my half-crown, I might have to trudge back to Cherrington.

All my earthly hopes just now were centred on my having an interview with the Lord Chancellor. I did not see any possible way of getting it unless this fellow would give me admittance. I felt very much inclined to believe that the Chancellor might be indoors at that very minute.

With a despairing clutch I grasped my last half-crown. Its seven brethren of the last sovereign which I had changed, had taken to themselves wings, and had all flown away in the course of the day. It was a desperate speculation, but I thought that I would venture this last half-crown on the chance, however remote, that something good might turn up from it. I slipped, not without a severe twinge, the last half-crown—the last rose of summer was a mere nothing to it—and said:

"I am sure, my good fellow, that you know the way how to bring me into speech with the Lord Chancellor."

"Lor, bless you!" he said, with a grin, as he pocketed the half-crown, which would be something far less to him than it would be to me. "It's of no use in the world your coming here, thinking that you may be able to see my Lord Chancellor. I thought that everybody knew that his lordship at this time of the year is almost always in the Court of Chancery."

"But he comes home," I said, thinking that my half-crown might persuade the man, at some time or other to usher me into the august presence.

"Bless your heart, we never knows when he comes home. He may have to go and see the Prime Minister or some other nobleman about business, or he may have

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to go down to the House of Lords, or he may go to his own private rooms at the House of Lords."

"But he comes home," said the man, with another grin; "but do you think that he would see you after all his work, for all that? Unless you have an appointment with him it would be more than my place is worth to let you in."

I thought of reclaiming the half-crown; but that was obviously impossible.

"And do you mean to say that I shall never be able to see him?"

"Well, sir," he said, "I see you're a thorough gentleman, and I'll put you up to a way by which you most likely may be able to see him. You should go to Chancery Lane, sir. He has got a little private room close to his court, and you might find him there. At least, you are certain to find him there if you are at the place in good time. Most likely he'll speak to you if you send in your name and business. He's a haffable gentleman after all, in spite of people being so frightened of him."

At all events, I had now got hold of a piece of definite intelligence in return for my money. I made my way to the Holborn end of Chancery Lane.

I threaded a variety of complications among the Law Courts, where I saw quite a variety of judges sitting in robed state, as like one another as one egg is to another egg, or one old woman to another old woman.

At last I stumbled upon the Lord Chancellor's court; but I was positively informed that "the court had risen," which legal phrase, as I subsequently gathered, signified that when the clock had pointed at four the Lord Chancellor gathered his legal petticoats around him and fled the place to recruit his vexed soul with a dry biscuit and some dry sherry.

I was out in a minute in a decidedly dark and awkward passage.

"And can you tell me where the Lord Chancellor is?" I asked of a little red man against whom I had stumbled in the passage, apparently another specimen of the usher species. "Can you tell me which is his private room?"

"And what do you want of the Lord Chancellor," he inquired, "that you want to go to his private room?"

"That is my business, my friend," I answered, a little nettled that "man, proud man, dressed in a little brief authority," should thus put me through my paces.

"And what *is* your business?" inquired the man, fixing upon me one of the sharpest and most penetrating glances that I ever felt in my life.

"The world's a wide one, my friend," I answered, "and there's room enough in it both for you and for me. I suppose I may want to see the Lord Chancellor without telling you all about it."

"But I *am* the Lord Chancellor," said the little old man with another of those penetrating gazes.

I was really so dumfounded that I did not at all know what to say.

"You look to me," he said, with another of those sharp looks which literally seemed to transfix one, "like some poor devil of a curate who's come out of the country to worry me about some living."

"My lord," I said, "you have stated the facts of the case with great accuracy. I am an unfortunate curate who have come up to London on purpose to speak about a living."

"Come in here," he said, with an amused twinkle of the eye and a not unkindly voice. "I was just going away for the day, but I can spare you five minutes."

He led the way into a small room, comfortably but very plainly furnished, nothing like so good as my own study at Cherrington vicarage.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he said, with an almost cruel abruptness.

I stated my case in a few brief, but I really think I may venture to say vigorous and well-chosen, words. At least I had conned them again and again during my recent journeying, in case I should manage to get an interview.

"Have you any references or papers of any kind?"

"None, my lord, except a few words from my bishop. He is the only person of influence with whom I have any acquaintance."

"The Bishop of ——. I think Cherrington is in his diocese."

"Just so, my lord." And I produced the bishop's brief testimonial letter.

The Chancellor rapidly glanced at it, and next he glanced at his watch.

"I see, Mr. Vavasour, that the five minutes of which I spoke to you are out."

I stood mute and disappointed.

"Would eight o'clock in the morning be too early for you to call on me at my residence?"

"Oh, no, my lord," I said.

I should have said the same thing respecting any other hour he might have named.

He gave me a nod, which I rightly interpreted as a dismissal.

In a few minutes I was blundering, half-dazed, among the cabs, carts, and omnibuses of Chancery Lane. I had no other course than to go to an hotel and remain there in person until Mr. Dawson, in his capacity of father-in-law or churchwarden, should release me, with a view to Sunday's duties.

I was close to the Lord Chancellor's house the next morning, and hung about it till the bells of a neighbouring church-tower should clash eight.

I then gave my customary double-knock. My friend of the preceding afternoon opened it, and for a moment a pantomimic gesture of surprise stole over his impassive features. Without a word he ushered me into a dining-room close by.

It was a dull cold morning, and the Lord High Chancellor was stretching his right honourable person on a rug in front of the fire. He advanced and shook hands.

"Ah, Mr. Vavasour, good-morning! Have you breakfasted?"

As a matter of fact, I had only had a biscuit and a glass of water. So I said that I had not.

"Very well. Then you shall have some breakfast with me. Burroughs," to the man, "bring some cold chicken and another tea-cup."

I sat down amazed. In all my experience I had never heard of the like of this—that I should take a friendly bit of breakfast with the Lord Chancellor.

"Now, Mr. Vavasour, not to keep you in any suspense, I may tell you at once that I mean to give you my living of Cherrington."

"My lord, my lord!"

"I find, Mr. Vavasour, that you are a scholar, which is not the case with every clergyman. I find also that you have so far managed the parish of Cherrington very creditably. I have these two facts on the excellent testimony of the Bishop of——. Now I assure you, Mr. Vavasour, that I have very often great anxiety about these livings. I am most anxious to appoint the best man. The difficulty is to find out the best man.

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But in the present case I have no difficulty on this point. I can place the utmost reliance upon your bishop's recommendation."

"I am sure, my lord, that I will do my very best, all my days, to deserve it."

"I am quite sure you will. But I appoint you simply and solely upon the strength of what the Bishop of—— says about you. I have not sat so long with him in the Upper House without seeing how thoroughly good and honest he is. And please tell the bishop when you next see him, with my best regards, that I have had great pleasure in giving you this living in consequence of his favourable report. After breakfast I will give you a line to my secretary of presentations, who will put you in the way of all necessary steps."

I hardly know how I got through my breakfast, but in some fashion I did so, and I know that it did me good.

With a full heart I left the house, knowing that my fortune was made. I glanced at Burroughs, the man in the hall.

If I had had the money in my pocket, his half-crown ought to have blossomed into a five pound note. But I regret to confess that Burroughs has never received the five pound note.

Indeed, though I was now practically a beneficed clergyman, I had nothing in my pocket that could take me home.

The thought occurred to me that I might ask a cousin of mine, a lawyer in a good way of business, to help me. I went and asked him to lend me a sovereign to enable me to return home.

"No," he said, buttoning up his sensitive breeches pockets. "I make it a rule never to lend anything to anybody."

"As a minister of the gospel, I must remind you that we are told that we ought at times to lend."

"Mr. Vavasour, I am perfectly shocked to hear a clergyman of the Church of England talk in such a way. I knew, too, you had made a poor sort of marriage; but I did not think that you had sunk so low as to be driven to borrow a sovereign."

"I don't know what you mean by sinking so low. I only know that the Lord Chancellor, with whom I have just breakfasted, has given the living of Cherrington, which is more than four hundred a year."

"Whew!" said my second cousin, with a sort of gasp. "That quite alters the case. Now I dare say, my dear Vavasour, that you will want some money to pay induction expenses, stamp duty, dues to Queen Ann's Bounty Office, and that sort of thing. I can lend you a hundred pounds on the usual business terms."

I did not express my opinion of the fellow, but borrowed a proffered sovereign to enable me to return to Mary and the little ones. I sent it back to him in the shape of a guinea next day, and have not seen him from that day to this. It is astonishing how ready people are to oblige you when you are in reality independent of their help. Even dear old Dawson left me, I believe, a much bigger slice of his property than he would have done if I had been a poor man.

This was the way in which I planted my footsteps on the first rung of the ladder of clerical promotion, of that great success in life for which I cannot feel too humble and too grateful.

[This was substantially a story of early days which a very distinguished dignitary used to relate of himself. Its leading incident is strictly true, and seems worthy of a safer record than mere tradition.]

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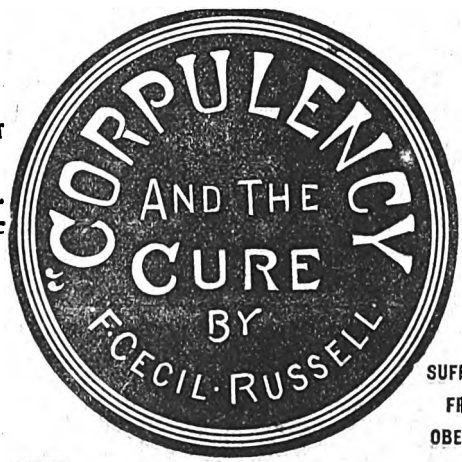

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The Log of the Albatross.

It is a very, very simple tale that there is to tell; the story a woman's faithful hope—just that.

Of all the women I have ever known, Beata Mandrix was, I think, the noblest-hearted, and the truest.

Hers was, in one way at least, no ideal life, as her husband, between whom and herself there existed the most perfect affection, was away from her, and from his home, nine months out of the twelve; he being in command, and part-owner of the sailing barque *Albatross*, a fine teak-built vessel of some 700 tons burden, trading to the West Indies, and the coast of the Southern American States, between, that is, Florida and Chesapeake Bay!

Now, for a sailor's wife, Beata Mandrix was strangely ignorant of the manners and customs of the sea, and this for two reasons.

First, because David Mandrix, thoroughgoing seaman though he was, invariably left ship matters strictly behind him at the Dock Gates, believing in the complete contrast of wife and home, and home interests, and also it must be said in woman having quite enough worry in connection with her own domestic affairs, without having the anxieties and responsibilities of man's especial sphere added to the heap.

Then, secondly, Beata was an inland country girl, born and bred in Shakespeare's County, lovely Warwickshire. Ormiston Farm, far from the sound and smell of the salt sea, had been her little world, until she met David Mandrix, and by that time her love for wood and meadow, leafy lane and golden corn-field, had become a very part of her nature, which not even the magic words of one who knew so well the wondrous secrets of the mighty deep, could charm away or displace.

So it was, therefore, that when, during one of his rare home residences, Captain David's wife told him one day of a certain dream she had had, he was the more astonished, and even puzzled.

"You are sure," he said to her, "that the word 'log' was distinctly conveyed to your mind, sleeping though you were?"

"Yes, dear, spread out before me was a large book, with, along the top of each page, printed in large type: 'Ship's Log. Barque *Albatross*, of London.' In a sort of cloud appeared your head, out of it also seeming to stretch your hand and arm. You, or your hand rather, wrote something which I could not quite decipher upon the right hand page, then after signing your name at the foot, and deliberately tearing out the page, you and it vanished, leaving the mutilated book in front of me. It remained a moment, and then also disappeared, and I awoke."

"I should have said that your last night's supper had disagreed with you," said the captain, smilingly, "but I can't get over the 'log.' You've never heard the word before, at least not from me; and more than all, the words on the top of the pages of the book are absolutely correct. I'm not superstitious, although I am a sailor, but I must confess to being a bit mystified over this thing."

Beata was, somehow, sorry that she had told him, for he was to sail next day, and she could not shake off the notion that a disaster of some kind was in the near future about to befall her husband.

She was angry with herself for indulging in this train of thought, the more so because she could not shake off the impression it created in her mind.

David Mandrix would never allow his wife to "see him off." He had a horror of scenes, and felt that the parting, as parting there must be, was better gone through in the privacy of home than in the presence of a crowd of "all sorts and conditions," with whom it was no matter of concern whatever.

This particular trip of the *Albatross* was to be longer than usual, as she was to extend her voyage to Demarara, there to open up a new trade, if possible, the demand for British Guinea products having increased of late.

As a proper understanding of the ship's adventures will be better arrived at by accompanying her on her course, it may be just said that Beata sat down to wait the issue, possessing her soul in patience, although an

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Put a Remedy in His Coffee and Without His Knowledge of the Secret Was Completely Cured.

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she saved her brother from ruin, and her words burn with a new hope to every woman who would rescue a son, brother, or husband from the scourge of drunkenness.

"May every mother, sister, or daughter learn from my experience, is my devout hope, and in thus making public the story of our private misfortune and subsequent blessings it is my earnest desire that every woman read in my words the way to happiness, not only for herself but for the man who is struggling with the curse of liquor upon him. Dr. Haines, who discovered Golden Specific, is deserving of woman's homage, and I am glad to know that he will send a free trial package of the remedy to every woman who writes him.

"Send your name and address to Dr. J. W. Haines, 3248 Glen Bldgs., Cincinnati, Ohio, U.S.A., and he will mail the remedy to you in a plain, sealed package, and thus you can begin the cure at once. The remedy is odourless and tasteless, and you need have no fear of discovery."

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Dear Sir,—Just a line to acknowledge having received the beautiful present; it was beyond expectation. There are a lot of goods from a Glasgow firm but nothing compared with the British Goldsmiths Company's goods. We are knocking them in the shade altogether. Everyone who has bought our goods speak very well of them. I will do my best for your Company in little Wales.—Yours fraternally,
WILLIAM WILLIAMS.

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"We have received some samples of the jewellery now being sold by the British Goldsmiths Co., the value of which is really wonderful considering the low prices asked for the goods. The British Goldsmiths Co. send out their goods to be sold by those who wish to put their spare time to good advantage. We should think there would be little difficulty about selling the goods we have before us. They are substantial, well finished, and cheap. The company offers a handsome present free to all persons selling a certain number of these articles."—HOME SWEET HOME, *Jan.* 5th, 1901.

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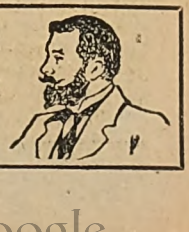

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ever deepening grey shadow, such as she had never known before, rendered her task of waiting a weary one, at times, almost an insupportable one.

All went well with the *Albatross* until she reached one of the Azores, where she put in for a few days to repair a mysterious leak which had appeared a few days before.

Putting to sea again on the fifth day. during a stiff breeze, that rapidly freshened into a gale, the barque held a straight course for St. Thomas'.

A brave man to his heart's core, David Mandrix could not help feeling unwontedly uneasy after leaving the little Spanish port.

He argued with himself and took himself severely to task for giving way to fancies, engendered he knew by a rec ollection of that strange dream of his wife's on the eve of his leaving England.

It was well perhaps for him that he had not much time for morbid brooding, for the exigences of the ship's situation, in the teeth of an Atlantic storm, demanded his whole energy and attention.

Still his thoughts, even when a fiercer blast of wind than usual, threatened to carren the vessel, would turn to the anxious little woman living alone in that quiet country village, and to what he was beginning to assure himself was a prophetic intimation of calamity for both of them.

He fought vigorously against the desire to make the prophecy true by writing a message to his wife upon a blank page of the ship's log, and signing it, that when the need came, he might commit the book to the sea, hoping that the friendly element would cast it up at the feet of his Beata.

Every day, every hour the probability became almost certainty that the hand of God was in the thing, and that He does speak to the children of men in these latter days in dreams and visions of the night.

It was when, the leak having broken out again, the *Albatross* became practically water-logged, that David seriously bent his mind to the carrying out the notion that had been haunting his brain night and day.

It was a dark night, the sky a vast black pall. The wind whistled and tore through the shattered rigging, to which was added intermittent storms of heavy rain and sleet.

Giving the command over to his chief officer, David went below to his cabin, and shut to the door.

He could hardly keep his feet, so sharp was the angle taken by the ship every now and again, when struck by a heavy sea.

He got out the log, and placing it on the lid of his chest, propped it up as well as he could, and on a fair blank page wrote the following:

Sweetheart

I am thinking of you, and praying that this may not last very long. God bless you, my darling, and always remember that your love for me has been the one good thing of my life. Good-bye! Good-bye!

Your own David.

From David Mandrix, master of the barque *Albatross*, of London, to Mrs. Beata Mandrix, of Rosedene, Farnham, Surrey, England.

Wrapping the book itself in a piece of sail-cloth, several times folded, he bound it firmly up, and going out upon the deck made the package fast to a large spare spar—a top-gallant yard.

At the moment when he judged the ship had but five minutes life left in her, he with the help of Andrews, the mate, cast the spar with its message into the sea.

That was on July 6th. On Nov. 10th, in the same year, a big liner was breaking her record to New York, when on a calm, clear day, the look-out saw and reported a spar with an object—he could not say exactly what—attached.

Without stopping the steamer's way, a large grapnel let down grabbed the spar as it drifted past, and hauled it aboard.

* * * * *

On Christmas Eve a woman sits alone in a fire-lit little room with her hands before her, gazing abstractedly into the red coals.

She sees all sorts of things there, things that make her, to tremble and sob.

A letter is brought in to her, and a large unfamiliar-looking package.

She is impelled, somehow, to open the latter first. It contains a large parchment-covered book. There is no title upon the front or back.

She opens it, and it falls apart, at the portion of it where one page, the right, is written upon, the left a blank.

Is it a dreaming over again, only more vividly, the dream of that other night, months ago?

It is the same book, and the me sage there transcribed is the one thing only needed to complete the vision.

I cannot say that she weeps—she cannot. Oh! that she could!

Tenderly! so tenderly! she removes the precious leaf and sits with it, poor soul, holding it in her two hands till morning light.

Then tears flow, and the relief is great.

And her treasure?—that leaf of the *Albatross's* Log?—she has it to-day, holds it, prizes it as her best, her choicest treasure, for is it not her David's message as he made to cross the river and enter the haven on the other side?

And she would join him there, some day soon—her David; she would show him that she never forgot!

Ralph Enderby.

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The Capture of the Boer Capitals, and the Hoisting of the Flag at Pretoria.

A Companion Volume to "TOWARDS PRETORIA."

By JULIAN RALPH,

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Extra crown 8vo, cloth, price **6s.**

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Pearson's New Magazine for Ladies is a magnificent success. This was only what might have been expected, judging from the manner in which it was produced; nevertheless, it has been very gratifying to us. From the expressions of approbation which have been received, it is clear that already the *"Lady's Magazine"* has won its way to the esteem and patronage of the most fashionable and cultured ladies in the land.

We may now look forward with pleasure to seeing the *"Lady's Magazine"* in the boudoir or the drawing room of every lady who would lay claim to any place in Society or Fashion.

Much appreciation has been shown for Mr Hall Caine's Novel *"The Eternal City."* Needless to say, each instalment of this story increases in power and intensity.

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UXURIOUS MAGAZINE.

It is full of

IGHT and LIFE.

It is the

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FOR

ADIES.

OOK OUT FOR No. 2,

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Number 2 of the *"Lady's Magazine"* will be on sale on ***Saturday, February 9.*** If possible the contents are more varied and altogether of greater interest than No. 1. There is another large instalment of *"The Eternal City,"* the second of the series of articles by the late Mrs W. E. Gladstone, a charming Story by Flora Annie Steel, and a number of Storyettes, Articles, and Poems, all of which it is believed will be dear to the heart of most ladies.

Be sure you get a copy, published Saturday, February 9, by Messrs C. Arthur Pearson Ltd.

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RESULT OF THE "QUICK CHANGE" COMPETITION.

THERE was only one competitor who succeeded in sending in a correct list. The Graphophone has, therefore, been forwarded to him, viz.:

Mr. E. HEALEY,
8 Central Terrace,
Coatham, Redcar.

Three competitors had one error each, and divide the second prize between them:

James Moore, 6 Southview Street, Belfast.
Mrs. H. Harper, 33 West Parade, Rhyl.
George D. Taylor, 3 Pryme Street, Hull.

Eight competitors with two mistakes share the massed amount of the third to eighth prizes:

E. Shalcross, 71 Myddelton Street, Clerkenwell, E.C.
P. Burke, 4 Rembrandt Terrace, High Road, Lee, S.E.
A. J. Smart, 16 Hamilton Road, Highbury, N.
Miss E. Martin, 17 Dolby Road, Fulham, S.W.
W. Perkinson, 48 Lancaster Street, Blackburn,
Miss A. J. Braden, 34 Little London, Chichester.
A. Brad-haw, 34 Seaford Road, Eastbourne.
E. W. Sanders, 10 Alderney Street, Pimlico, S.W.

THESE ARE THE CORRECT PICTURES.

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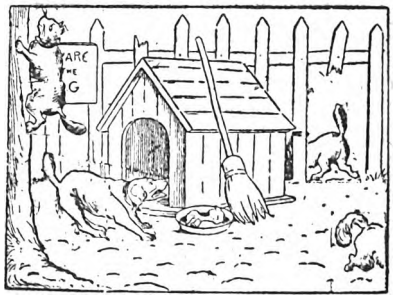

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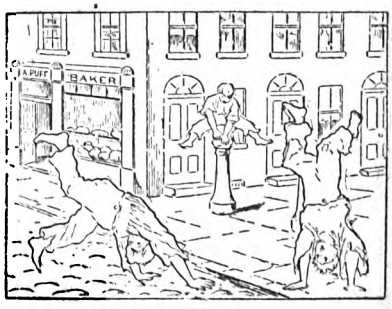

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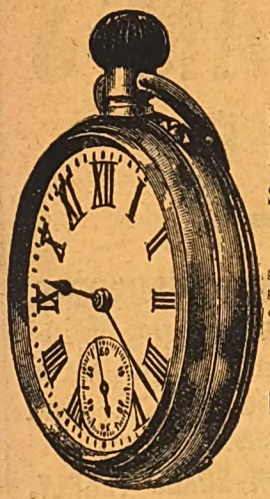

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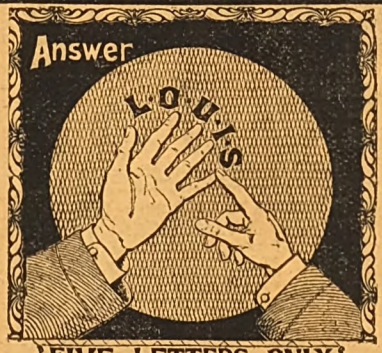

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ADY'S MAGAZINE, NO. 2 NOW READY. PRICE 6D.

SHORT STORIES

A WEEKLY MAGAZINE FOR HOME AND TRAIN

No. 633. FOR WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 16TH, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

A Good Appetite; Enjoyment in Eating.

What is Appetite after all? Really a sensation of hunger caused by a craving of the digestive organs for work to do. Nature provides this craving for food so that the Body shall be well nourished. Hence it follows that a sharp Appetite is a good and natural thing to have. No one need be ashamed of it. And what after all is enjoyment of food—the so-called indulgence in the pleasures of the table—but proper and efficient Digestion of Food?—in moderation of course. If you do not digest what you eat, you certainly do not enjoy it. Quite otherwise; you are subject to pains, aches, stuffiness, Nerve Depression, and a host of minor ailments which quite destroy enjoyment. You may even fear and loathe food, and dread having to eat at all. But what can you do? You must eat, for you cannot let yourself starve. Approach the subject from another point of view. Consider how food is digested, how it is absorbed, how it enriches the Blood, and how finally it is transformed into vitality, vigour, health and strength, to replace the waste of hourly decay. Realise at once that you can facilitate, promote, and make easy all these processes, and that you can do it simply, cheaply, and efficiently by the use of

Guy's Tonic.

Do not allow possible prejudice against proprietary medicines to sway your judgment. Because some are bad or indifferent, do not condemn Guy's Tonic. Judge it fairly on its merits. Examine its claims to your consideration. Realise by enquiry what good Guy's Tonic has done, and is doing, in thousands of cases. Investigation will soon convince you that Guy's Tonic is a genuine British remedy, prepared from the formula of a West-End Physician. He tested it, altered it, and from time to time improved it, during a long and varied practice, before it reached its present perfection. Nothing good gains lasting success, and affords comprehensive benefit, at a bound. It must go through a period of trial, stress and test. Guy's Tonic went through this long ago, and emerged triumphant. Never did a Remedy offer so much value, and do so much good, at so small a price (a six-ounce bottle costs only 1/1½), as Guy's Tonic. January, 1901, was a record for Guy's Tonic. The sales were larger than in any one month before. What else, after more than ten years' working, can this mean other than that Guy's Tonic holds its customers; that it does them good; gives prompt relief, and thus has a host of friends, who gladly recommend it to others?

A new size (Six Ounce) Bottle of Guy's Tonic, price 1/1½, is now on sale at all Chemists and Stores.

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Tastefully trimmed with a fancy silk braid, as shown in sketch; full, well-made skirt. Produced in Specialite Serge and Venet an Cloth in Black, Navy, Fawn, Grey, Brown, Purple, Green, and Red. Good fit guaranteed. Price only 10/6; carriage paid 6d. extra; or Skirt alone 5/6; carriage paid, 6d. extra.

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WARNING. *Instead of using the common White Headache Powders, which generally consist entirely of a crude drug, which has been condemned as dangerous by the medical papers, insist on having a bona-fide anti-quack remedy, recommended by such eminent medical authorities as Dr. RAMAGE, L.R.C.P., Dr. THURSTIN, L.R.C.P., late Dr. BOYD-WILLIAMS (Liverpool), the Editor of the Medical Journal, "Health," etc., etc. The name of this safe remedy is KAPUTINE.*

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Every man suffering from Varicocele and the allied troubles, should send for treatise, describing their Causes, Symptoms, Results, and Successful and Painless Treatment without surgical operation or the use of cumbersome trusses and electrical appliances. Will be sent sealed, post free, three stamps.

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7 Southampton Row, London, W.C.

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Keating's Lozenges

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CURED. This can be done with or without patient's knowledge. Send me a stamp and I will tell you how. (Send no money.) Address, in confidence, Mrs. C. H. (Room 8), 195 Oxford Street, London, W.

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can be made by any lady who follows carefully the Paper Pattern and instructions.

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The Best and Daintiest of Ladies' Weeklies. You should get a Copy at once.

ONE PENNY.

PILES!! TO CURE PILES!!

A NEW SCIENTIFIC REMEDY.

MOST IMPORTANT TO SUFFERERS!

The Recipe of an Eminent Physician for the Relief of the above distressing ailment will be sent Post Free for 1/2 Postal Order. Address:

Mr. BEESTON, 8 Church Passage, Cross Street, Islington, London, N.

FREE, FREE. NO MONEY REQUIRED. WE TRUST YOU.

Our £2 10s. Real Silver Watch (with chain), or A Real Gold Ring Set with REAL DIAMONDS and other stones.

We give you your choice of either of these handsome presents for selling NINE articles of Jewellery at 1/6 each. (Regular price 2/6).

We do not want your money.

Just send us a stamped addressed envelope and say that you will either sell the jewellery or return it to us if you fail to sell it. On receiving your letter we will at once post you the jewellery.

When sold, send us the 13/6 you have received for same, and we will at once send you ABSOLUTELY FREE our £2 10s. Real Silver Watch with Chain, or the Gold Ring, whichever you desire.

You can sell our Jewellery in a few minutes at 1/6 each article. We have thousands of testimonials as to the quality and value both of our Jewellery and Presents.

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SEVEN PRIZE MEDALS.

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2% on CURRENT ACCOUNTS, on the minimum monthly balances when not drawn below £100.

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 633.] For the Week Ending February 16th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

THE WEIRD CASE OF OLD BAVIDGE.

By W. DELISLE HAY.

As a young man I entered the office of Bavidge and Co., merchants, trading with the East, chiefly with Singapore and Penang. I have used the plural, but in reality the firm consisted solely of one—old Bavidge, as we clerks called him. There never had been any other members of the firm. Old Bavidge had worked his way up from what he was accustomed to call "the bottom rung of the ladder." When he first set up in business on his own account, as a commission agent, he had styled himself Bavidge and Co., and so he had continued to do after he prospered and became a merchant on a larger scale.

There were four of us in the office, and sometimes one or two more, when a press of business made it necessary. But we were merely clerks and no more. Old Bavidge liked to keep things in his own hands, and make confidants of no one. His clerks had no responsibility, and were not trusted with any knowledge of the conduct of affairs. In point of fact we were one and all little more than old Bavidge's writing and cyphering machines. The result of this was that we had no chance of rising in the office beyond a not very exalted point. Few clerks stayed more than a year or two, therefore.

Now I remained with Bavidge for more than six years, and the reason for that will presently appear. I was nominally head-clerk at the end of that period, but my salary was not much more than it had been at first, and though I necessarily learnt a good deal of the nature of my employer's transactions, yet he never took me into his confidence or talked to me of the prospects of concerns in which he was engaged.

Old Bavidge lived at Clapham, in a very nice house of the villa species. He was a confirmed old bachelor, but had long ago taken to live with him a widowed sister and her young daughter Emmeline. The latter he doted on.

Even when a little thing she was the queen of his household and the light of his life. As she grew up the best governesses and masters were engaged to educate her, and finally she spent two years at a finishing school near her home.

Our employer was often in the habit of inviting one or other of his clerks out to Clapham. He was a kindly man and liked to exercise hospitality towards his *employés*. These visits were great events in the eyes of his clerks.

They fared sumptuously, were kindly treated, and invariably fell incontinently in love with pretty little Emmeline. Need I say I followed the example of my predecessors and companions in this last respect?

Indeed, I soon adored my employer's niece, and it was for the sake of sometimes seeing her that I remained on in his service, and rejected various opportunities of getting into a more prospectively promising berth.

Latterly I had risen in favour, chiefly because Bavidge had taken up an enthusiasm for his garden and hothouses, and I had in early years imbibed a good deal of horticultural knowledge.

He, who knew nothing of the art, was glad to find in me someone to talk to about it and advise him. So I became a very frequent visitor at Clapham, and often enough I was asked out on Saturday afternoon to stay over till Monday.

At the time when I had been six years in the office, Emmeline had left school for good and had "come out"—whatever that may mean. My passion for her was becoming serious, and she was so kind to me, and so intimate with me, that I had much ado to refrain from declaring myself.

I knew too well that to do that would but lead to my dismissal from the house. Bavidge was not likely to encourage a suitor who was merely his clerk, and whose means consisted solely of £120 a year, paid monthly. But I was young and would not despair.

It was about this time that an event happened which, looking back by the light of later experience, my memory reverts to, as the first link in the chain of evil, of which I have yet to tell.

One day, I had been out for an hour or two during business hours, and on returning to the office was jocularly condoled with by my fellow-clerks.

"You've missed something," they said. "We've just had a real 'Penang lawyer' in the office."

It turned out that a Malay, wearing his native dress, had called upon our employer. He spoke English well, my fellow clerks said. He had sent in a neat, glazed card bearing the name of Zamat Driss, and had mentioned that he had just arrived from Penang.

To add to the singularity of this visit, it appeared that old Bavidge had been heard to speak in high and angry tones to the stranger at first, though what he said was inaudible through the closed doors. But he had soon quieted down, and after an interview lasting

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more than hour, he had gone out with the stranger, both apparently on the best of terms.

We did not see the Malay—if such he were—in the office again; but I have reason to think our employer met him elsewhere subsequently.

A few days later, I casually remarked on the Oriental's visit.

"To be sure," said old Bavidge, "a most worthy man; a merchant at Penang. Not a little curious," he went on musingly, "not a little curious I should have been doing business with his firm for more than thirty years, and this is the first time I've met one of them face to face." Presently he added: "There's a pretty general belief in the craft and guile of these Orientals, now, I've always found them keen traders, but thoroughly honest and trustworthy. Thoroughly honest and trustworthy," he repeated. "I'd rather deal with a Malay than with either a Greek, a Jew, or a Yankee any day."

But he gave me no information concerning Mr. Zamat Driss, or of the purport of that individual's visit, either then or at any other time.

As the weeks and months went by after this, I began to notice a change coming over old Bavidge. He was fidgety and restless, contrary to his ordinary character; he betrayed great anxiety on the arrival of each mail from the Straits Settlements; he had the air of a man who has some great weight on his mind.

He lost interest in horticulture.

If I had not known him to be an ultra-cautious trader, always averse to rash speculation, I should have supposed that he had risked his all upon some great transaction.

One night I had been dining at Clapham, as was frequent, and the old merchant and I were sitting alone together over some choice port which he had recently added to his cellar.

We were aroused by the sound of carriage wheels, and then by a commotion at the front door.

I think he must have drunk a little more than usual, at any rate he became mellower than I had ever seen him, and let me into his mind perhaps more thoroughly than he intended. It began by his saying, in answer to some remarks of mine:

"Well, no, I don't feel the same interest in the garden just now. The truth is, I've other things to think about."

Then he rambled on, talking more to himself than to me.

"Besides, what's the use? I don't think we shall be here another year. I'll buy a nice place of my own, for Emmeline; I'll settle it on her; somewhere—a little further out of town, perhaps. I shall be in a very different position after—hum!"

And here he ruminated for a moment.

"I don't see why I shouldn't be elected alderman. Greenway says I might, even now. And—and—by-and-bye possibly the chair. Why not? Emmeline would be Lady Mayoress then, of course. Ha, ha! Bless her heart! We'd have to get her a husband—a nobleman—who knows?"

But here some uneasy movement of mine disturbed the current of his thoughts. He looked at me and awoke from his reverie.

"There, get along to the drawing-room, lad. I think I must have a little nap after that wine. Yes, yes, and you shan't suffer for sticking to me; there'll be a rise for you in my office yet, perhaps. We shall see before long."

About a month after the conversation recorded above, there was a great banquet at the Guildhall, given by the Lord Mayor and Corporation to some illustrious personages from abroad.

I don't know how he managed it, but old Bavidge in his usual pushing way contrived to get himself numbered among the guests. Business was concluded at the office in the usual way on the appointed evening; after that, old Bavidge dressed there and went off to the Guildhall.

He locked up the safes in his private room before going, put the keys in his pocket as he was accustomed to do, and bade me go out to Clapham for the evening, if I liked, to amuse his sister and niece in his absence.

Between nine and ten o'clock that evening I was sitting in the Clapham drawing-room playing, or making believe to play, a most delicious game of bezique with sweet Emmeline, while her mother tranquilly dozed in her arm-chair by the fire. From this blissful condition of peace and quiet we were aroused by the sound of carriage-wheels grinding on the gravelled approach outside, and then by a commotion at the front door.

We rushed out to see what was the matter, and then all became confusion, dismay, wailing of women and helpless wringing of hands.

Poor old Bavidge was borne in, speechless, inert, scarcely conscious; amid the loud lamentations of terrified women he was taken upstairs and laid on his bed, while somebody ran for the nearest doctor.

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I also took upon myself to send off, post-haste, for a physician of eminence.

When the local practitioner came, he first talked of apoplexy, the shook his head gravely over the patient, and then set about such restorative measures, as suggested themselves to his experience.

From a City friend, who had kindly accompanied my employer from the Guildhall, I gleaned all that could then be ascertained of the circumstances attending this sad affair.

While the guests were assembling at the Guildhall, old Bavidge had been seen wandering about the library, museum, and other chambers, talking to various acquaintances. He was then apparently in the best of health and spirits.

At the banquet my informant had sat next to him, and on his other side was a foreigner, of whom many were present. This was an Oriental, the gentleman stated, one of the suite of some Indian rajah, he thought; at any rate old Bavidge seemed to know him, for they talked together a good deal.

Half-way through the dinner my employer had begun to complain of not feeling well; his indisposition rapidly increased, and just before the speech-making began he turned quite white and feeble, while the sweat stood in beads upon his forehead.

Apparently finding it hopeless to struggle any longer against the fain ness that was overpowering him, old Bavidge now made an effort to withdraw from the hall quietly, while he could do so without attracting attention.

He seemed so feeble and tottering that my informant was quite concerned, and gave him his arm, while the Oriental also assisted him on the other side; they got him out into the waiting-room, and then the gentleman went to look for Bavidge's carriage, leaving then the Oriental with my employer.

He was some minutes away, and when he returned Bavidge was much worse; he could no longer speak, or even stand; they had to get the help of some waiters to lift him into the carriage. The foreigner's attentions were given in the kindest possible way; but my informant would not hear of his leaving the Guildhall, as he offered to do, and himself got into a carriage and brought my poor employer home.

The eminent physician I had sent for shortly made his appearance. As soon as he saw the patient he intimated to me that death was at hand. Then a short colloquy was held by the two doctors apart. I ove heard a word or two of their consultation, as it happened. The local practitioner seemed to be urging something, which the other pooh-poohed.

"Preposterous, my dear sir," I heard him say. "At a Guildhall banquet! Nonsense! No, no, one of those cases of obscure cardiac disease, ending in sudden and unexpected syncope. The case is plain to me."

The local doctor relinquished his opinion, whatever it was, and bowed to that of the great man. A sudden weakening of the heart's action was, they told me, the cause of old Bavidge's prostration. There was probably some unsuspected organic disease, and this, acted on by the excitement of the banquet, had resulted in syncope.

Meanwhile the patient lay white and motionless upon his bed, scarcely breathing. Towards midnight he opened his eyes and looked at us. He gazed at Emmeline and her mother as they knelt sobbing by the bedside, then at me, the doctors, and his friend, who still remained. He seemed to make great efforts to raise his left hand, but could not succeed in doing so, and kept looking at it and then at us.

"Curious," said the gentleman who brought him home, "he kept doing that in the carriage."

The physician lifted the hand and looked at it. A slight recent cut or scratch was perceptible on the ball of the thumb.

He seemed to make great efforts to raise his left hand.

"That's it," said the great man. "His weakening faculties are fixed upon this little cut, you see. Likely he caught his hand on something just before the seizure, perhaps even in the carriage."

And then old Bavidge gasped and gasped as if he tried to speak but could not. And finally he looked wistfully and yearningly at Emmeline and then at me. And a half-whisper gurgled from his stiff lips. I thought he said: "Take care of——"

But then the spirit fled, and left me for ever uncertain whether he meant to warn, or wished to give his dear one into my charge.

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The funeral took place a day or two later, and then the will was read. Except a few legacies, including a year's salary to each of his clerks, the testator bequeathed all he died possessed of to Emmeline.

The trustees, two City friends of Bavidge's, appointed an accountant to wind up the dead man's affairs, and asked me to remain at the office and help him for the present.

The day after my employer's death, I had gone to the office to inform the other clerks. I was rather surprised to find my poor old Bavidge's keys upon the table in his private room. But everything appeared to be locked up and undisturbed.

Still the forgetfulness was unlike the man, and I took it as indicating the beginning of his seizure.

Yet there was something mysterious about it, for I fancied recollecting his taking those keys away with him, and he certainly had not returned to the office before the seizure overtook him.

The housekeeper whom I questioned on this head—our office was a set of chambers in a large building—had not seen or heard anyone come in after we left.

She fancied someone had come in late at night, because in the morning she had seen muddy footmarks on the stairs she had cleaned the night before.

But there were many offices in the building, and nothing to indicate which of them the person had gone to, if any such had indeed entered at all. It must have been somebody belonging to the place, at any rate, or he would not have had a latch-key for the outer door. The matter did not rest in my mind just then.

When the accountant and I came to look into affairs, we found the business extremely compact and simple, and the records thoroughly posted.

It seemed that when all goods and securities were realised, there would be some £80,000 at least for Emmeline.

This was our first impression, but it quickly appeared we were premature in accepting it.

We received intimation of a large credit given to "Bavidge and Co." by a bank; then another similar claim was heard of, and then various unaccountable acceptances began to crop up. It appeared that large transactions in the East were still in progress.

The odd thing was that no reference to these matters appeared in any of the books. All I had had any knowledge of was straightforward and easily understood, but these latter affairs were a puzzle indeed.

Only one unheeded scrap of paper thrust away in a corner threw any light upon them. There seemed to have been a memorandum upon it, pencilled by my late employer.

There was a column of figures with dates and initials opposite them. We gathered eventually that it was a rough list of bills and acceptances now falling due; but it did not enlighten us, except as to the total amount, which was startling.

The paper appeared to have been used as a wrapper for others, as on the back of it appeared the indorsement—"Vouchers of Z.D. and others."

Of course, we made diligent search in every possible place for papers relating to these matters. We found none; but we discovered that certain pages had been extracted from Bavidge's private books; that receptacles wherein I knew he kept invoices, vouchers, and such-like documents, were wholly or partially empty, and that a small journal he used to carry always about with him was missing.

We could only conclude that everything relating to the operations he had recently embarked in had for some reason been carefully destroyed or secreted.

Of course inquires were made on our behalf at Singapore and Penang. After long waiting we learnt that these would be practically fruitless, unless we could produce the missing accounts of the transactions.

The firms which had been authorised to draw upon Bavidge had supplied goods to persons acting as his agents. These, again, had transferred value to others.

Since the transactions were numerous, generally petty in detail, and passed through many hands, it would be an arduous task to follow any of them up without any record of them in hand to guide us.

Moreover we had nothing to show to make good our claims, and were consequently not in a position to force information from naturally unwilling people.

For example, there was a native firm at Singapore, composed of Chinese and Malays which, had agents in every Eastern port.

Such of the transactions as were traceable appeared to have ended with these people.

But they blandly declined to discuss matters which, they said, referred to business concluded and done with. If we, the representatives of "Bavidge and Co.," had any claims to make upon them, these must be brought forward through the usual channels.

This firm, our English correspondents in Singapore informed us, was one of long standing and repute. There had been rumours it was shaky some months before, but it had recently recovered ground and enlarged its operations.

To make an end of this part of my story, it was plain that old Bavidge's money had flown away to the East. When, some months later, all the claims we had knowledge of were made good, and coming through London banks there was no way of evading them, the trustees considered themselves justified in winding up affairs and making a settlement. Nearly all the property old Bavidge had possessed was required to liquidate the credits he had received. A mere pittance remained for Emmeline and her mother. They had to give up the villa at Clapham, sell the furniture, and go into furnished lodgings.

It was a sore trial, but the two poor things bore up bravely. Under the sad circumstances I had ventured to speak to Emmeline, and we were now formally engaged. But I had lost my situation, of course, and the new one I presently got did not seem to justify me in pressing my dear girl for our immediate union. We saw that we must wait awhile.

One day I was pacing up and down the great hall of the Guildhall, brooding over past events. Suddenly I was tapped on the arm and accosted by a stranger. He wished to put some trivial questions relating to the place we were in.

Looking at him, I saw the man dressed in the semi-nautical costume of a ship's captain or mate when ashore. He was of very dark complexion, with black hair and eyes, and he wore rings in his ears. He spoke English fluently, and talked like a well-educated person, but he was evidently a foreigner.

I was able to give him the information he desired, which related to the history of the Guildhall, and we dropped into conversation on antiquarian topics, the stranger evincing no mean acquaintance with the subject. This led to our presently wandering off to the museum, to look at some of the Roman relics placed there.

Now my mind was continually running upon the memorandum marked "Vouchers of Z. D." which I

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referred to a Malay who, it will be remembered, had once called at the office some months before old Bavidge died, and whose name was Zamat Driss.

It was my private opinion that this person could give, if he choose, much information towards clearing up the mystery of old Bavidge's affairs. But all inquiry had failed to elicit anything with regard to him. And then there was the Oriental who had sat by Bavidge's side at the banquet. Could he be identical with Zamat Driss? Nothing more had been heard of him.

As my new acquaintance and I were ascending the stairs leading to the museum, it occurred to me that he was too dark to be the Portuguese I had hitherto fancied him.

It now struck me he might be an Oriental, and, as courteously as I could, I asked if such were the case. He replied indifferently that he came from Singapore. Here was a discovery. In a moment impulse prompted me to ask if he had ever met one Zamat Driss there.

The first effect of my questioning was not a little surprising, though I did not at the moment see any significance in it. He staggered as if I had struck him, and a singular expression came into his dark eyes, a stealthy feline expression, if I can make myself understood by so describing it. But in a moment this had passed. He smiled and said:

"Perhaps you are not aware, that the names you mention are nearly as common among Malays as John Smith among yourselves? I have known several men called Zamat Driss. If you can tell me more about your man, perhaps I could help you. Where did you know him? And why do you ask about him?"

I mentioned that the man I sought had done business with my late employer, Mr. Bavidge, and that there were circumstances making it desirable he should be found. Then it was the stranger's turn to ask questions. He seemed unaccountably interested—excited I might say—by what I said. His eyes gleamed and sparkled like a snake's, but his manner was so composed, his politeness so excessive, that I answered him with incautious freedom.

But presently he told me he could not recollect any person answering to the one I was in search of. I had been led on to talk so much that I now felt greatly disappointed. I would have left him, only he seemed so sorry not to be able to help me, and so voluble in leading conversation into other channels that I was induced to linger with him.

We were now in the museum of the Guildhall, looking at and soon chatting about the various antiquities stored there. By-and-bye we came to a rather dark corner where was nothing very interesting, but my companion seemed especially drawn that way; and presently, behind a pile of broken sculptures, he pointed out to me some objects I should not otherwise have noticed.

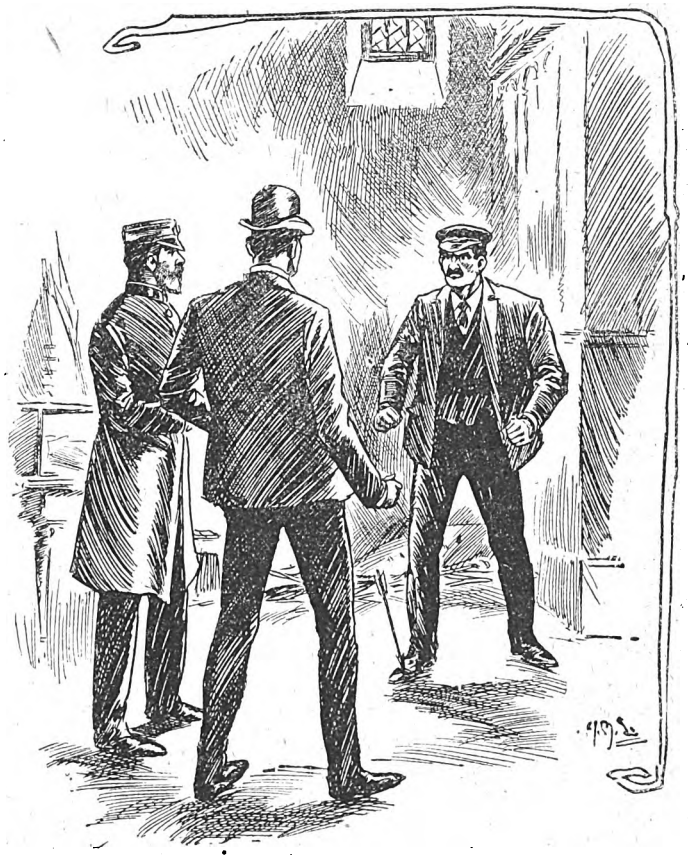
These appeared to be a bundle of bows and arrows and other weapons, covered with dust, and, to all appearance, shoved away there and forgotten.

He took up one of the arrows which lay a little apart from the rest and examined it.

"This," he said, "is of modern make. Rather out of place here, isn't it? I fancy it comes from some island of the Asiatic Archipelago. I've seen the like at home."

He went on to descant about the making of these weapons by savage tribes in an easy way, but with so much detail that it interested me. He told me of the rough tools employed and bid me observe, nevertheless, how beautiful was the finish attained.

That I might the better see the perfection of the point and barb he laid that in my hand, he continuing to loosely hold the shaft attached. At the moment the point of the weapon lay in my palm I noticed his hand



For just a second he glared at me and at the attendant with a tigerish look.

shake a little. Fearful of receiving an accidental dig, I hastily slipped my hand from under the point, looking innocently up at him as I did so. What I saw in his face was—well, if never before or since my eyes met those of a murderer, they did so then. Though far from thinking that at the moment, I yet started violently with a sudden, indefinable fear. My start was accelerated by an official voice near by, saying:

"You must please not to touch the things, gentlemen."

It was an attendant whom I had not previously noticed who spoke and now came up to us. His voice, together with my start, so affected the dark stranger that he let the arrow slip from his hand. It fell point downwards upon his foot. For just a second he had

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glared at me and at the attendant with such a tigerish look that I instinctively stepped back.

Then he stooped and began to examine his foot, and I saw that the arrow had slightly pricked him, having passed through the thin cloth "upper" of the boot he was wearing.

He handled the place with far more attention than such a trifle seemed to warrant. When he rose there was a new expression on his face, one that it was easy even for me to understand—an expression of intense, livid terror. Hoarsely he murmured:

"I am hurt, I am hurt! I must go! Ah, it is Fate! Fate!"

He spoke again in what was, I suppose, his own tongue, and, wringing his hands with a gesture of frantic despair, glided past, rapidly and disappeared from the room.

I was about to run after him when the voice of the other spectator stopped me.

"Well, I never!" he exclaimed, picking up the arrow and restoring it to its place. "These Indian chaps make a deal of nothing. As if a mere scratch could signify."

Then a sudden idea shot into my mind which caused me a thrill of sickening horror. What if the arrows were poisoned.

I had read that savages in many parts of the world were in the habit of putting poison on the points of such weapons. What if the stranger knew the fact! What if——

As soon as my mind was clear enough I began to question the attendant. He told me the weapons had been temporarily deposited there some years before.

Apparently they had been forgotten. Poisoned! He had never heard tell, and didn't believe in such things. At any rate he didn't believe poison on an arrow would keep active for years. Very few people seemed ever to discover these weapons or notice them because they were laid almost out of sight.

The last time he had seen anyone look at them was long since. There was a banquet at the Guildhall so he remembered the occasion. Some persons came into the museum before the dinner and he remembered there was an Indian rajah or Siamese prince, or something of that sort, as he judged from his dress, among them. This man was looking at the arrows with another, an Englishman. He did not remember what the Englishman was like. And that was all he knew or could recollect.

My thoughts were so tumultuous and my head swam so with the real or fancied discoveries I believed I had made that I could only go home to think. Next morning all was still confusion, but I had resolved to see the Clapham surgeon who had been summoned to old Bavidge's deathbed. With difficulty did I get him to listen to me. At last he got interested. He acknowledged that, when first called in, he had momentarily suspected some unnatural cause for the seizure certain symptoms being peculiar but the eminent physician had set his mind at rest on that point, referring everything to cardiac disease, and his authority on such points was almost absolute.

This doctor however was sufficiently interested to aid me in obtaining permission to examine the arrows. We tested them on rabbits and soon had clear evidence of their venomous and deadly character. A slight film of varnish-like matter was perceptible on the points. A clever analyst pronounced this to be of vegetable origin, but was wholly baffled in trying to ascertain what it was. It was akin to "woorari" he thought. After this discovery some effort was made to find out the depositor of the weapons, but all trace of him had disappeared, and it was surmised that he had either died or forgotten the matter.

The physician on being told what we knew and suspected, declined to alter his opinion that Bavidge had died from anything but heart-disease. The Clapham doctor half inclined to my opinion, but he pointed out to me that it would be impossible to prove it now. The poison was one of which no trace could be detected, because no tests for it were known. Exhumation of the body would, therefore, be futile. And even supposing that it was proved that old Bavidge had died because his hand had been pricked by a poisoned arrow, there was no evidence of crime. It might have been accident. No criminal could be named, no crime could be proved; just as the accountant had told me that no evidence of fraud really existed. A lawyer I consulted told me much the same thing.

And yet I have worked out a theory in my mind which I believe to be the truth. I think that a plot was formed in the East and that Bavidge was selected as the victim, probably because he was not only wealthy, but was also known to conduct his business in an unusually private manner. Zamat Driss, the Malay, came to England to execute the plans. First, old Bavidge was lured into some large undertaking. Most likely the enterprise was genuine and the securities given to him for advances also good, for he was not the man to be taken in by false representations.

But when he had embarked all his credit, in other words, his capital, then the conspirators sought to secure it to themselves.

Driss effected the murder of Bavidge at the Guildhall, by means of the poisoned arrows (which he may possibly have deposited there himself). How he did so I guessed from my own adventure.

It will be remembered that the Oriental stranger, doubtless Driss, who sat beside Bavidge at the banquet and left the table with him, was afterwards alone with the half-conscious sufferer for a few minutes. What more easy to pick his pockets of the keys and pocket-book?

During the night, probably disguised, he might have used the keys to let himself into the office to destroy every paper referring to his own securities. Hence his villainous associates would be enabled to retain Bavidge's property without anyone being the wiser.

Now I think that the fascination which causes a murderer to return to the scene of his crime brought this man again to the Guildhall. Fate, or the hand of God, led him to accost me. By accident he learnt from my words what doubtless led him to suppose I was on his track. He instantly conceived the idea of removing me by the same apparently accidental means he had used against my employer.

That the wretch went from the Guildhall to certain and immediate death, I know and his look and words now assure me that he also knew it. I never succeeded in tracing him, but I suspect it was his body that was picked up in the Thames a week later. The description I read of a "foreign seaman found drowned" sufficiently tallied with my recollection of the Malay. But the actual robbers, of whom he was but the active agent, are they never to be pursued and brought to justice?

I am only a poor clerk, though I am rich in dear Emmeline's love—who is now my wife—but the only thing I regret is that I have neither means, nor time, nor ability to hunt down the plunderers of old Bavidge, the associates of his assassin.

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A STORY FROM JAPAN.

In that low quarter of the city of Yedo, called Shinagawa, there lived a poor sandal-maker. He was very poor, and belonged to a proscribed tribe of Etas, a race which previous to the present era of refinement and enlightenment, lived by themselves, the spurned and despised of men; able to follow certain trades of a menial character, such as the flaying of animals, the execution of criminals, and the making of sandals and clogs, to which the free-born citizens would not stoop.

Poverty and misery preyed upon the mind of the poor sandal-maker so much that one night he said to his wife:

"O, Taki, I wish I could be a great lord for a few days, to do nothing, to eat and drink of the best, and never be obliged to think of spending a tempo."

"Don't be stupid, Denkichi," replied his wife, "you would never do to be a lord, you might just as well try to swallow Fuji" (the great mountain).

But the god Inari, who was prowling about as was his wont, heard this, and resolved that he would teach the poor man a lesson in contentment. So when the sandal-maker was asleep between his grimy quilts he appeared to him, and said:

"You want to be a lord. Very well, you shall try it for a week."

The sandal-maker rubbed his eyes and awoke. He was in a beautiful room, the walls of which were hung with curiously-painted scrolls; the mats were of the finest and whitest straw; his quilts were of the softest silk, and his pillow was of camphor wood with a roll of the best bamboo paper tied upon it.

As he awoke a servant approached him kneeling with a tray of sweetmeats. Denkichi took a handful and swallowed them, smacked his lips, and cleared the dish. The servant prostrated himself to the mats and retired, as he came, kneeling.

"Well," said Denkichi, "this is luck! I suppose I'd better dress."

His old garments were gone, and in their place was a suit of splendidly-embroidered silk, fitted with stiff cardboard wings, and adorned with huge white crests of oak leaves. A personage, who seemed to be a sort of major-domo, appeared, and informed him that the suitors were waiting in the ante-room.

"But where's O Taki?" asked Denkichi.

The man shook his head.

"Well, as I'm a regular lord," thought Denkichi, "I may as well see what it's like; but I should have liked O Taki to have seen me. And these clothes are confoundedly hot and heavy. But never mind, here goes."

So he went into the ante-room, where there must have been at least a hundred people assembled, who all made obeisance as he appeared.

The major-domo showed him a sort of raised daïs on which he was to seat himself, and for three long hours he was obliged to remain motionless, listening to claims and petitions, and remonstrances and beginnings of favours, and details of estates, and of revenue, and of a hundred other things about which he knew nothing.

Several times he felt as if he would have liked to jump up and stretch his legs, and hitched himself uneasily, but the eye of the major-domo spoke a silent remonstrance, and he subsided with a sigh.

When at length the business was concluded, Denkichi was about to fling off his robes, and lie down as was his wont, half-naked, with his pipe between his lips and a bowl of wine beside him, when the major-domo informed him that the hour of the midday meal had arrived. At this repast he was introduced to the ladies of his retinue, who were magnificently arrayed, but so staid and solemn of demeanour, so unable to appreciate the jokes by which he had won for himself the name of the "Shinagawa Wit" that he would much rather have had his plain, homely O Taki by his side.

The meal was splendid, but Denkichi would have preferred a dish of stewed eels, a bowl of Yakidofu, and a measure of Three Virtue wine, to all the delicate dishes presented to him, so smothered in condiments and sauces as not to preserve an atom of their natural flavour. It was a long affair too, and when it was over he exclaimed with a sigh of relief:

"Well, at any rate, now they'll let me have an hour's peace."

But the major-domo appeared, and reminded him that the fencing-master was waiting. So poor Denkichi was obliged to incase himself in a heavy suit of chain armour, and for more than an hour attack and defend, repeat, parry, cut, lunge, and dance about until he was well-nigh dropping with fatigue.

After the fencing came the master of Chinese, and after the master of Chinese the music instructor.

A few cups of tea—spoilt, so thought Denkichi, by the infusion of cherry flower—somewhat refreshed him, and for the first time during the day he was enabled to get a few minutes of such rest as his stiff raiment would allow him. But the business of the day was by no means over.

A council of the heads of the ward was held, at which Denkichi presided, and again he had to sit listening to dry arguments on questions of law, petty differences of opinion, long speeches, and statements about matters in which he did not feel the slightest interest. This was followed by the evening meal, an entertainment just as formal and twice as lengthy as that at midday.

He was almost asleep with weariness and fatigue, and would have crept into his sumptuous bedchamber, but the major-domo—how he hated that major-domo—told him that a new theatre had been opened in the quarter, and that the people would be offended if the lord were not to honour the first night with his presence.

A fresh suit, if possible, heavier and stiffer than the first, was necessary for this performance, and not until the small hours of the next morning could poor Denkichi at last throw himself down between the quilts, only to be aroused in a short time to meet the assembly of suitors.

So for a week this continued, with but little variation. On the evening of the sixth day, Inari appeared.

"Well," he said, "how do you like it?"

Denkichi fell down on his knees. "Let me go back this minute!" he cried, "and never more shall you hear a word of discontent pass my mouth."

Inari granted his prayer, and he found himself back again at the hut at Shinagawa with O Taki by his side.

So utterly wearied and worn out was he that he slept during the whole of the next day, and then he related his experiences to a wondering circle of friends. But he never more was heard to grumble at his lowly condition.

FRANK ABELL.

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THE LION'S WARS

The Cabul War of 1836-1842.

INDIA is such a far off land, its people, climate, and country so different to our own, that till recently events of even the most vital importance excited but a languid interest. The mutiny in 1857 roused the country, it is true, but the danger once passed we paid little heed to its affairs till the stealthy but unceasing extension of the Russian empire in Asia woke into active life the Sleeping Lion of Britain.

To-day we keep a watchful eye on India, and especially Afghanistan. We know that its existence as an independent buffer state, for which the mountainous character of the country admirably fits it, renders India secure.

Our great Indian rulers foresaw, as far back as the commencement of the century, the dangers to be apprehended from foreign aggression, and it was a cardinal feature in their policy not only that Afghanistan should not be weakened by civil strife but that its rulers should take their policy from Calcutta.

In 1838 Lord Auckland, then Governor-General of India, sent an army into the country to reinstate Shah Sujah-el-Malek on his long lost throne of Afghanistan, His lordship at the same time issued a proclamation declaring that he was acting in the interests of the Afghan people whose welfare he had at heart.

It was necessary that we should intervene, for our secret agents had discovered that the Shah of Persia, forgetting with true Oriental ingratitude that he was indebted to us for his throne, was intriguing with Russia. Dost Mohammud, the Ameer of Afghanistan, had given so many proofs of his loyalty to the British that when the Shah of Persia, secretly encouraged by Russia, publicly proclaimed his intention of seizing Herat, Dost naturally looked to England for protection.

Why Lord Auckland should have refused assistance, especially as he knew that Persia and Russia were hand in glove with each other, seems strange. But he did, his motive, it is stated, being that he had conceived the wild idea of restoring to the throne of Afghanistan the old and once formidable Duram dynasty in the person of Shah Sujah. Whether the Afghans would have preferred Shah Sujah to their reigning monarch matters not. They probably liked neither, but as they hated foreign intervention more, they at once, as soon as it transpired that Shah Sujah had accepted the British offer, prepared for war.

At the close of the year 1838 a British army of 30,000 men, officered and paid by the East India Company, crossed the Indus in two columns. The first check was caused by the refusal of Ranjit Singh, the head of the Sikhs, to allow us to pass through his territory. This compelled the troops to descend the Indus a thousand miles and march by way of Kandahar to the Afghan capital. After leaving the boats they crossed the wilderness of Cutch Gandara. The distance across was only 150 miles, but the heat was so great that the mortality amongst the men and cattle from want of water was terrible.

After Sir John Keane had assumed command, one of the columns was sent through the Bolar pass in the Brahm mountains, sixty-six miles in length. Fearing

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attack, our men by means of a forced march, upset the Afghan plans, and managed to arrive at the other side without incurring loss.

On April 6th the two columns met near Quetta, and after resting, separated to continue their march on the capital. Again the plans of the Afghans were defeated. After the spies of the enemy had discovered our route, we retraced our steps and proceeded through the pass of Kajuk.

On April 25th Shah Sujah entered Kandahar. The other column arrived on May 4th, and the army encamped under the walls of the city. On arriving at Ghazni on the 21st of the following month the men found that the town was protected by fortifications of such strength that a siege train would be necessary for their destruction. The walls were of immense thickness and sixty feet high. In front were several ditches filled with water and not shallow enough to ford, and further protection was afforded by a deep river. What was to be done? An assault would have entailed heavy loss and a retreat still greater dangers. Knowing the treacherous character of the Afghan the garrison was sounded. A traitor was soon found. A nephew of Dost Mohammud offered for a large sum to betray his uncle's fortress.

Whilst our artillery was thundering at the enemy's wall on the night of the 22nd, a party of engineers exploded three hundred pounds of gunpowder at a secret gate called Kabul shattering it in ruins. The storming party under Colonel Downie at once dashed into the fort. Leaping over the debris our men rushed forward, completely surprising the garrison. At this juncture the gallant little advance guard nearly came to grief.

The main column under Brigadier General Sale was hurrying in the footsteps of their comrades when one of the engineers of the exploding party rushed up, saying that the gateway was so blocked up with fallen masonry that it would be impossible to enter. Sale had already ordered the retreat when he noticed that the man seemed strangely excited. What if the shock of the explosion had unhinged his reason. So he ran to the gate and to his joy found it clear.

"Now my men," cried Sale, "make haste or we shall be too late."

The little band, back to back. were fighting for their lives when assistance arrived. Then ensued perhaps one of the most desperate fights ever recorded in history. Our men were confronted with the very pick of the Afghan warriors whom they resisted for over two hours.

One enormous Afghan nearly ended the career of General Sale. He had brought the Englishman to the ground with a sabre cut, and had drawn slightly back to deliver another, when his foot slipped and he fell. In a moment the Englishman was on him. Over and over they rolled amongst the other combatants. During the struggle the hardy mountaineer made repeated efforts to draw his dagger but his wrist was held in a grip of iron. Suddenly the General developed a fresh attack. Quitting his hold on the other wrist he made a supreme effort and jerked the mountaineer on his back. Before his antagonist could draw his dagger, Sale had seized a sword and with the pummel battered his foe's head till he became insensible. There were other hand-to-hand encounters equally as desperate as this one but space forbids our dealing with them.

After a desperate struggle the garrison capitulated. Our loss in killed was seventeen and 165 wounded. Of the Afghans we not only killed 600, but we took 1,600 prisoners. But it was the capture of a fortress they had fondly believed was invulnerable that made the Afghans indisposed to continue the struggle. Dost Mohammud besought his officers to try their fortune once more against the Feringhi dogs but they hung back.

"I will put myself at your head and after my death you can make your own terms with Shah Sujah," he said, but ere the chiefs, who asked a day for thought, could decide, the British had reached the capital. Finding that the town was threatened in two directions the Ameer sent his artillery to Argandeh and fled on August 2nd towards the Hindoo Kush. A strong force of cavalry under an officer afterwards known as Sir James Outram at once started in pursuit. But their guide, the nephew of Dost Mohammud who had helped them to win Ghazni, being an impartial sort of traitor, this time befriended his relative. He took our gold it is true but he directed our men wrongly.

In due course Shah Sujah was installed as Ameer but regarding him as the puppet of a foreign power the Afghans resolved on the first opportunity to depose him. Calcutta soon learnt that in Afghanistan potentates placed on the throne by the sword have to be kept there by the sword. The army of invasion therefore became the army of occupation. Then our troubles commenced.

Shah Sujah's rule was soon so openly scouted, that in a very short time his authority extended no further than the territory occupied by the British Army. Seeing that the dangers of our occupation would increase unless we captured Dost Mohammud, Sir Robert Sale was instructed to obtain possession of this person. After a hunt extending over two years, he ran the ex-Shah to earth.

When the authorities at Calcutta received the unfortunate potentate, they thought that Afghanistan would at last settle down. They were wrong. Ever since the British occupation, a secret conspiracy had been maturing to expel the intruders. Although its ramifications extended to all parts of the country, the secret had been so well kept that the British Resident, Sir Alexander Burnes, was blissfully unconscious of its existence. Even when Abdula Khan, a chief with an exceptionally evil reputation, even for an Afghan, dropped dark hints as to what was in store for us, no suspicions were aroused.

Early one morning a howling mob collected outside the British Residency. Sir Alexander attempted to address the crowd and was stoned. When one of his suite fell shot through the brain, the fury became general, till finally the Kabulese, after setting the house on fire, attempted to storm it. With death staring him in the face, Burnes allowed a treacherous Afghan, who promised to effect his escape, to disguise him; but no sooner did he reach the garden than the guide called on the crowd to slay the English dog. A forest of knives gleamed in the air and the Resident was soon hacked to pieces. The native soldiers attached to the British Residency offered a brave resistance, but they were overcome, and the inmates of the house, men, women, and children, slaughtered.

On the news reaching the British camp, Colonel Campbell was ordered to proceed to the Presidency with assistance. Losing his way, his men presently found themselves in one of the narrow streets of the city. He had not gone far when the progress of the columns was checked by a strong barricade. As they turned to retrace their steps, the mob closed round the

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One big Afghan was carried to a little group in which were crouching some ladies with their little ones.

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little force, the deadly knife claiming so many victims that but for the arrival of Brigadier Shelton they would have been massacred to a man.

Although the safety of our Army was now seriously menaced, further disasters might have been averted had the generals in command acted with common courage and prudence. With a lack of judgment that was simply incredible the little force was at once divided into two divisions. One being stationed at Bala Hissar and the other at some cantonments quite two miles off, the difficulties of communication being greatly increased by the river Kabul and a broad canal which ran between them.

But there were worse blunders committed. All the supplies were lodged in a small weak fort nearly half-a-mile from either of the stations and, to crown all, neither of the British camps could possibly be defended being located in a hollow surrounded by lofty hills. Two days later our incapable general sent a detachment to enter the city. It was so ridiculously small that it was at once driven back with heavy loss.

Now thoroughly alarmed, General Sale was ordered up from Jalalabad, and General Nott who was at Kandahar was asked for a couple of regiments. Nott sent reinforcements but they were driven back, and Sale being short of provisions and ammunition was compelled to withhold assistance.

A short respite and then a few days later thousands of Afghans, attracted by the prospect of plunder, swarmed round the British camp. Their first act was to force us to abandon the commissariat fort which they at once looted. When Shah Sujah, from the battlements of Bala Hissar, saw his triumphant subjects leaving the fort in hundreds laden with booty he exclaimed, "Surely the English must be mad."

Why General Elphinstone did not at once join the divided forces it is impossible to imagine. Led by a Commander who understood his business the British troops in Afghanistan should have made short work of any force brought against them. What Elphinstone did, although he had enough supplies for twelve months, was to write to Macnaghten, the new Resident, advocating a retreat. His officers then becoming alarmed persuaded Elphinstone to recall Shelton and give him the post of second in command. But Shelton, although a man of great courage, was of so fiery a disposition that his plain speaking so irritated his chief that any advice he gave was scouted. The Afghans, emboldened by our inactivity now began to encircle us. Shelton led a couple of sorties with his usual bravery, but by this time our men had lost all confidence in their commanders, and on both occasions retreated.

A little later we captured a fort the enemy had erected close to our position, but it was a near thing, and the operation cost us 200 men.

Fate seemed to have mapped us out for special persecution, for the imbecility which characterised our operations in this war now extended to our diplomacy also. Lieutenant Conolly, who filled the post of political agent to the Ameer, offered 15,000 rupees for the heads of the principal Afghan leaders. His instrument, Mohun Lal, soon found a couple of ruffians who expressed their willingness to undertake the job, but their nerves failing they split on their employers. Enraged at this perfidy the Afghans assembled on the heights and for several days rained on our troops below a most deadly fire.

Ordered to attack, Shelton stormed the heights, but he could not maintain his position and two days later had to retreat. After a rest he again carried the enemy's position but having only old-fashioned pieces of ordnance the Afghans were able, by creeping round the side of the hill to take us in flank. Worn with hunger and fatigue, convinced that their position was hopeless, not a man stirred when Shelton in order to anticipate the coming onslaught gave the word to charge. An Afghan chief planted a standard 30ft. from where our men had formed into square. "I'll give £50 to the man who pulls that flag down," cried Shelton.

The shadow of disaster weighed heavily on our men, and the offer was unheeded. When the Afghans charged, our men bolted to their cantonments. British soldiers flying from the foe! It sounds incredible, but it was true. Macnaghten then invited the Afghan chiefs to a conference, and signed a treaty agreeing to evacuate the country in three days.

Although Macnaghten hypocritically declared that we parted as friends, the wily Afghans were not to be deceived. They contrived to delay our departure till December 18th, when snow was falling, and Macnaghten, on his part, in the hopes of reinforcements arriving, tried to delay the march still more. Disappointed, he communicated with Akbar Khan offering to make him Prime Minister if he would have the Afghan chiefs arrested.

Akbar, who was the son of Dost Mohammed, pretended to assent, lured the British official to a meeting, and told him he should hold him as hostage for his father. In the scuffle which followed Macnaghten lost his life. Incredible as it may seem, the British generals actually offered to renew the treaty, which was, of course, annulled by this dastardly murder.

The demands of the Afghans then rose. They insisted that all but six guns should be surrendered, all spare muskets, and that General Sale, his wife and daughter, and the wives of some of the other officers should be also left behind as guests.

On January 6th, 1842, a force of 15,000 men, of whom 4,500 were British soldiers, demoralised by the incapacity of their commander, started on their ill-fated march home. No sooner had they started than their troubles began afresh.

Stimulated by prospects of plunder, the Afghans hung on their flanks like wolves. The soldier who fell out of the ranks for a moment's rest was doomed. A creeping form, two swift blows with the long Afghan knife, and then a crowd of wretches tearing the clothes off their victim for hidden valuables. The little force had hardly gone ten miles when the mountain thieves, impatient to begin, attacked the baggage guard. A deadly struggle and the survivors fly, leaving fifty wounded comrades in the hands of an enemy to whom mercy was an unknown quality.

There was no need to tell their tale when, panting and exhausted, the survivors reached their companions. Why speak when all knew that what had happened was only the prelude of worse disasters yet to come?

The close of the first day found the army so exhausted that, although the men knew the air of night was thick with peril, they sank to sleep, their only covering the snow. When the cold grey light of morn stole into the sky, the survivors awoke. With eyes averted, for the snow was deeply crimsoned, they rushed away, wondering why the greedy knife had not claimed them as well. Those dreadful nights—the days were bad enough—narrowing paths blocked at the end and bringing the little force to halt whilst death rained

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down on them from the heights above. Still the light was not withheld, and sometimes they saw their foes.

But the nights. A shuddering, cowering soldier half asleep would hear a sigh, a murmured prayer, a stealthy step gliding away in search of other victims, and then one comrade less at dawn.

At the close of the third day the troops staggered into a little mountain valley, looking so peaceful and pure in its garment of white that a hope grew up in their hearts that even foes as merciless as theirs would shrink from marring the beauty of this lovely scene.

Vain illusion. By morning the owners had transformed it into a shambles. This crowning calamity snapped the bonds of discipline. Freed from restraint, the men turned savagely on their officers, and would have played the game of murder, too, had not one exclaimed: "Why stain our hands with blood when their doom is sealed?"

Their ranks now thinned so rapidly that the survivors huddled together, as they staggered along, for warmth and safety. Up the mountain side where the sun shone clear and cold, down into cavernous depths where tribute was exacted, growing ever weaker and weaker till, scorning traps and ambuscades, the mountaineer met and fought them hand-to-hand. Then came a lull, and the few survivors began to hope that their troubles were at an end. Another rush, and this time so fierce that one big Afghan was carried to a little group, in the centre of which were crouching some ladies, wives of the officers and men, with their little ones.

There were no more respites after this. Hopeless as their plight seemed, the bulk of the army, or rather rabble, might have escaped if they had pushed on with as few halts as possible; but General Elphinstone, with the fatal lack of judgment which had characterised his proceedings throughout the campaign, halted at Batkah.

This gave time for Akbar Khan and a stronge force of Afghan horse to overtake the fugitives. The wily chief offered to spare the lives of the retreating force, but declared that hostages must be forthcoming for the surrender of Jellalabad. Major Pottinger, Captain Laurence, and Mackenzie were accordingly surrendered. The march was then resumed; but when they reached the awful pass of Khurd Kabul their remaining stock of hope gave out.

The tribes that lived in this gloomy country knew nothing of what this little force had suffered. Neither did they care. They lived by plunder, and were not averse to murder. The poor ladies, who had borne up with undaunted courage, sank sobbing to the ground as they gazed into the depths of this dread defile. Shorn as our men were of their courage, the little manhood left them kindled into sudden light at the grief of these poor souls.

Six hours of desperate fighting and they were clear again. But the losses; over 3,000 British soldiers perished in this ill-omened spot.

The remnant staggered on, dozing in the snow at night, and creeping along during the day. A little later the treacherous Akbar again appeared, offering to take charge of all the ladies and children who remained alive. Lady Macnaghten, Lady Sale, and nine other ladies agreed to go. It was well they did, for in a narrow gorge next day we lost 200 more.

Of the 15,000 men who had left Kabul, only 500 were now left. When they neared the frontier the little remnant were set upon by the Ghilzees, the fiercest of all the mountain tribes. From this point they had literally to fight their way, every inch being fiercely disputed by their remorseless enemies. One by one they either dropped overcome by exhaustion, or fell victims to the deadly knife. The number of survivors was only two by the time Futtchabad was reached, and of these one then died of hunger.

Out of the entire force of 4,500 men only one man, a Scottish surgeon named Bryden, escaped to Fellalabad. Counting camp followers, it is calculated that 26,000 lives were lost in this retreat.

The great heart of the nation stood still when it heard the news, and then silently but steadfastly prepared for vengeance.

[Another thrilling battle story next week.]

SPECIAL NOTICE.

The Editor begs to inform his readers that he has been fortunate enough to secure some excellent stories of a special nature, which will appear in due course, and which will do much to enhance the already great popularity of SHORT STORIES. Further particulars regarding these tales will be given next week. Meanwhile the Editor will be pleased if readers will call the attention of any of their friends who enjoy good fiction to this brief announcement.

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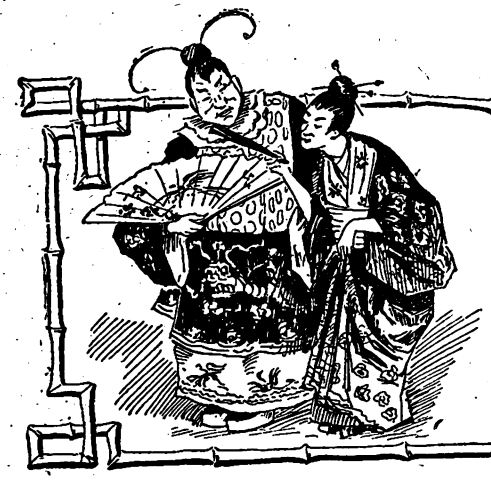

Mr. Bowser's Tribulations.

XXXV.—HE MAKES SOME AFTER NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS.

ALL was peace and harmony in the house of Bowser. Dinner had been disposed of, and the Bowsers sat reading, and the family cat lay on the hearthrug and slowly opened and shut her eyes and purred in contentment.

By and by Mr. Bowser laid down his paper, heaved a sigh of satisfaction as he looked around and then said:

"Mrs. Bowser, New Year's day has come and gone some weeks ago."

"Yes," she answered.

"In the early part of a year most people look back over the last twelve months and call up their shortcomings and determine to avoid them in the future."

"It is what they call 'swearing off,' isn't it?"

"Yes. It has got so that everybody pokes fun at the man who makes New Year resolves, but nevertheless it is right and proper that one should decide to do this or that to better things. I didn't say anything to you on New Year's day, but yet I had several things in mind."

Mrs. Bowser looked at him and felt a slight chill pass over her. If he had determined on any change of conduct, it would end in a riot in less than two hours.

"No; I didn't say anything on that day," he continued, "but I'm going to say something now. I have firmly and fully made up my mind to do different in certain matters. I shall make my resolves now. Mrs. Bowser, do you know I've got to be an old crank—a silly old crank, with ears a foot long?"

"You are nothing of the kind," she protested. "You get out of sorts now and then, as all husbands do, but that's to be expected. There is nothing you need feel conscience stricken over."

"But there are dozens of things. Yes; I'm an old crank and a bully. About four nights out of seven I come home ready for a row. If nothing else is wrong, I find a shirt button on the floor and use it as an excuse. By gum, but when I think of the rows I have raised over nothing I wonder that you have not stabbed me with a poisoned bodkin as I slept. The fact that you haven't simply proves that you are one of the sweetest and best little women in all the world."

"You have done nothing," she reiterated, "and so there is no need of any new resolves. Was there any late news of the war to-day?"

"I don't know anything about news of the war, but I do know that I'll make a change in myself or hire some jackass to kick me to death. Mrs. Bowser, I've been an old lallaloo."

In his agitation Mr. Bowser got up and began gesturing, and the cat grinned to herself and saw fun ahead.

"What's a lallaloo?" asked Mrs. Bowser.

"I don't know, but it's something very mean. Now, you look at me and hear me as I say from this time forth:

"First.—I'm not going to rage and roar around when I find a clothespin on the doorstep.

"Mrs. Bowser, I've been an old lallaloo!"

"Second.—If the beefsteak is over done and the coffee not up to the mark, I'm going to keep my mouth shut.

"Third.—If you discharge the cook, I'm not going to interfere and make a fool of myself.

"Fourth.—If the gas bill is a shilling extra or the coal is gone eleven minutes too soon, I'm not going to jump up and down and charge you with being the most reckless and extravagant woman ever born.

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"Fifth.—I shall bring home a cre[illegible]ar to-morrow, and the very first time I get one of my spells on I shall expect you to turn up your sleeves and hit me across the neck.

"Sixth.—I shall invest in no more tramps, lost dogs, spring t[illegible]nics or fire escapes, but behave myself like a sensible being. That's all, and now give your old hubby a kiss and let's be happy."

Mrs. Bowser embraced him and told him he was as good as gold and then used all her power of persuasion to get him to sit down to his cigar and newspaper again. She couldn't accomplish it, however. His conscience and his enthusiasm being aroused, he couldn't keep quiet. He wasn't satisfied with being good, but he wanted to be very, very good.

"How on earth you managed to put up with a husband like me all these years is a mystery," he said, as he walked to and fro, with tears in his eyes.

"There is nothing wrong with you," answered Mrs. Bowser, laying aside her book and rising up.

"There has been, yes, a thousand things wrong with me, but there will not be hereafter. When I have played the crank and the fool, why haven't you hired someone to kick me out of the house."

"I must go upstairs and shut the window," she replied as she moved away.

The idea was that if Mr. Bowser was left alone for a quarter-of-an-hour he would calm down and a row would be avoided, and five minutes had passed, and he was growing calmer, when the kitchen bell rang, and in a minute or two the servant brought him up a bill. It was a bill from the butcher amounting to one and four-pence.

Mr. Bowser jumped clear off the floor as he looked it over, and the next moment he was shouting for Mrs. Bowser.

She came rushing downstairs to find the cat grinning with delight and Mr. Bowser as red as paint, and he waved the bill up and down and demanded:

"Do you see this? I gave you butcher money, and what have you done with it? Spent it for novels and chocolates and run me in debt!"

"You made that bill yourself one day last week when you ordered chops. You had a five pound note and the butcher couldn't change it. Don't you remember?"

"Never! Never! I never ordered chops!"

"But you surely did. It was last Wednesday night, and you said it was New Zealand mutton."

"Woman, here is the incontestable evidence!" hoarsely whispered Mr. Bowser as he thrust the bill under her nose. "I give you money—millions of money—and you squander it and run me in debt! What sort of a wife are you?"

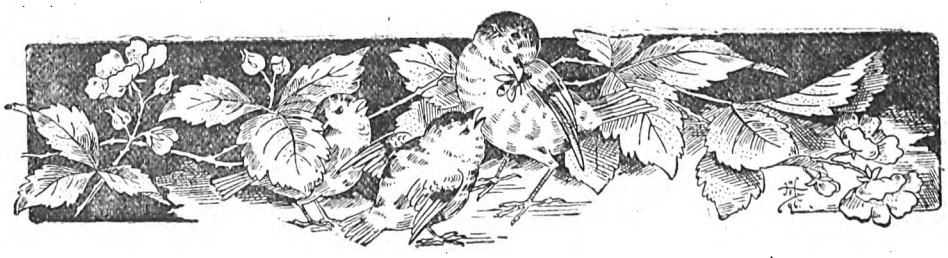
"I thought you had resolved to leave off being a crank," she quietly remarked.

"Crank! Crank!" he shouted as he jumped up and down and flourished the bill in the air. "I was never a crank! I am not a crank now! I give you money to pay cash down. I give——"

"It was a long time before he got up."

The cat stood with her back humped up and a wink in her eye. In his desire to make splinters of something Mr. Bowser rushed at her; but, striking a footstool, he fell over it and came to the floor with a crash and rolled over with his head under the lounge. It was a long time before he got out and sat up. There on the floor lay the guilty butcher bill, and there on the piano stood the innocent cat, gazing down upon him, but Mrs. Bowser had fled and left no tracks behind her.

M. Quad.



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BETWEEN TWO LOVES.

"WELL, Jack, old boy, you are a regular ass."

Thus spoke Lieutenant Burton to his friend and brother officer, Lieutenant Edwards.

"Here is one of England's fairest daughters head over ears in love with you. She is good-looking, affectionate, domesticated, and has means—just like the matrimonial adverts. isn't it?—and her father is the C.O. Now, if you had your own interests at heart, you would go in and win, and become the possessor of a lovely wife and greatly enhanced prospects."

"How you rattle on, Tom. If the lady is all you say, which I don't deny, why don't you go in and win yourself?"

"For the simple reason, my boy, that it would be utterly useless. Miss Arnthwaite keeps us all at arm's length, but when you condescend to honour the dances by your presence, her face lights up immediately."

"Don't be absurd, Tom."

"Ditto, my friend. Just because three years ago, a girl, who was not worth a second thought, jilted you for a wealthier suitor, are you going to mope your life away?"

"You know my sentiments, Tom."

"Sentiments be bothered."

"Will you be serious a moment? I don't mind admitting to you that I admire Miss Arnthwaite, but for the reasons I have given you on several previous occasions I shall never get beyond that point."

"What rot," was Lieutenant Burton's reply.

"All right, Tom. We have gone over all this before with the same result. Now suppose we adjourn to our respective couches."

Lieutenant Burton took the hint and departed to his quarters. As he walked along he communed with himself and while anathematizing his friend's obstinacy, he admired his feelings.

The two young officers had been schoolboys together, they had entered the army together and had been modern examples of David and Jonathan.

Three years before my story opens, something had happened which threatened to have a lasting effect upon Jack Edwards.

He had been engaged to the daughter of the vicar down at his home, Dora Armstrong, but suddenly a blow fell upon him.

He had met his sweetheart one evening, and with very little warning she told him that their engagement must become a thing of the past.

Not because she did not love him, said the fickle Dora. It was the old story. The vicar had only a small stipend and a large family.

The gentleman whom she proposed to install in Jack's place was wealthy and influential, and she was going to sacrifice herself for the sake of her father and the family.

She bemoaned the fate which demanded the sacrifice and managed to squeeze a tear or two to add effect to her protestations of affection and regret.

Jack pleaded for a while and then bowed to the inevitable.

It was a great relief to him when his regiment was ordered abroad—to India.

His chum, Tom Burton, of course, accompanied him thither, but before they sailed, the eyes of the discarded lover were opened.

It was the day before their departure. The two friends were seated in their room at the hotel were they had been staying, when a card was brought in by a waiter and the man who had supplanted Jack requested an interview with him.

Greatly wondering what this could mean, Jack told the waiter to show the gentlemen in and Tom he took himself to the smoke-room. The visitor entered.

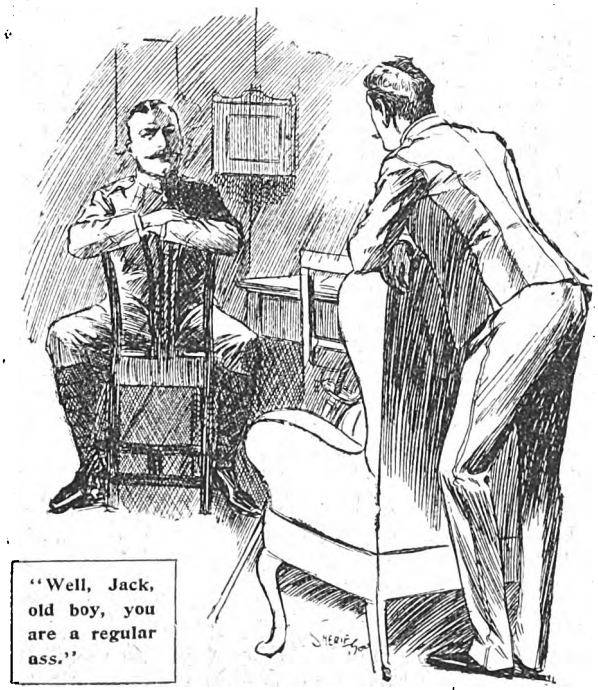
"Lieutenant Edwards, I believe."

Jack assented.

Without waiting for a reply, the visitor went on: "I must apologise for intruding upon you, Mr. Edwards. I am afraid your feelings towards me are not of the friendliest, but I can assure you that any wrong I have done you I have done unwittingly."

"I am afraid I don't follow you," interposed Jack.

"Permit me to explain. I did not know of Miss Armstrong's prior engagement until a few days ago. Had I known of it earlier I should never have made my proposal for her hand, and immediately I learned of it I withdrew. Of course, as you know, your engagement had never been made public, and it was only by accident that I became aware of it. Miss Armstrong has treated us both badly, for she has not been straightforward in her dealings with me either, and she is now free. But, if you will permit a stranger to advise you, you will think no more of her. I could not let you leave England, however, without setting myself right in your eyes. Now I am contented."



"Well, Jack, old boy, you are a regular ass."

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"You have acted most honourably, sir," replied the agitated officer, "but I am not quite sure that I can express any degree of gratitude at present. The information you give is very painful to me, as you will readily understand."

After his visitor's departure, Jack Edwards and his chum discussed the subject together.

Lieutenant Burton was very indignant and spoke very strongly, but when he had finished, Jack replied:

"Dora may be all that you have said, Tom, and yet because she is Dora, I still love her and am perfectly willing to marry her if she will have me."

Tom could do nothing but indulge in a wide eyed stare and a prolonged whistle when he heard this.

"I mean it Tom," went on Edwards.

"Do you? Then you are absolutely and hopelessly mad, that's all I have to say."

"All right, Tom, wait until your turn to fall in love comes."

"Long may it be delayed then, if there is any probability of it affecting me in the same way."

Lieutenant Edwards, in pursuance of his declared resolution, wrote to Dora Armstrong at the first opportunity.

He waited patiently for some time and then the reply came.

It was a refusal. Dora for some reason imagined he had had something to do with the eye-opening of his wealthy successor, and on these grounds expressed anything but regard for her former lover.

"That settles it," remarked Lieutenant Edwards when the received this missive.

"Does that effect your cure?" inquired Tom when the information was communicated to him.

"It cures me so far as this," replied Jack. "It practically condemns me to a bachelor's life, for while Dora Armstrong lives, I shall never marry."

"Why on earth not?" queried Tom.

"For this reason. Although, I have been most shabbily treated by Dora I still love her, and that being so, I could not in honour ask another woman to become my wife."

Time after time had the two friends been over this ground.

It was as Tom Burton said.

The pretty daughter of the Colonel reserved her sweetest smiles for the man who had banished himself from the land of domestic bliss.

Vainly had Tom tried to shake his friend's resolution. Up to the time our story opens he had failed to move him.

As he strolled home after that last conversation Tom Burton, good friend and chum that he was, meditated deeply on the subject.

"It's enough to make one wish the girl would die," muttered he. "If she would only oblige us by shuffling off this mortal coil, then perhaps my Quixotic friend would have eyes and heart for someone else."

Then another thought occurred to Lieutenant Burton. He wondered if it were possible to get a fictitious announcement inserted in the death list of one of the English papers. If this were done, possibly it would effect the object, but after reflecting thereon for a time he dismissed the idea as impracticable and too risky.

Three uneventful months passed and the subject was not again mentioned. Lieutenant Burton was taking it easy in his quarters. The mail had come in that day, and he had slung himself into a hammock to enjoy his letters and read the papers which had been sent out to him.

He got through the news and then turned his attention to the advertisements. Suddenly he bounded out of his hammock, and regardless of the dangers of sunstroke or heat apoplexy, he raced bareheaded across the square to his chum's quarters.

Just as he got to the door he stopped, thought a moment and then put the paper under his tunic. Having done this he walked into Lieutenant Edward's room.

"Any news from home, Jack?" he asked.

"Two letters—one from the mater and another from an old chum."

"Any mention of Miss Armstrong in them?"

"No! Why do you ask? You look rather excited."

"Do I? Well I suppose I am."

The visitor entered. "Lieutenant Edwards, I believe."

"What has happened, man? Who has she married?"

"She is not married, Jack, she is dead."

"Dead? Dora dead?" queried Jack. "How did you learn this?"

For answer Lieutenant Burton drew out the paper and pointed out the paragraph. Yes, there it was plainly enough.

> Armstrong—on the 7th. inst., at the Grange, Lydenham, Dora, only daughter of F. Armstrong, Esq. Friends will kindly accept this, the only intimation.

Jack Edwards read it through slowly and then re-read it.

"Poor Dora," he muttered, and as his chum, Burton, gazed upon him he realised how devotedly Jack Edwards

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must have once loved this girl who had died so prematurely.

When he remembered how he had almost wished for her death he felt a pang of remorse, and yet he could not entirely repress the thought that it was better so.

Very little was said on that occasion. Tom Burton left his chum busy with his reflections, but nevertheless he resolved to do his best to bring about the result he had so long had in his mind.

As time rolled on, the depression which had followed the news of Dora's death, wore off and Jack Edwards began to drift more and more into the scenes of gaiety, wherewith the officers and men stationed at the fort enlivened their period of service there.

While his late sweetheart lived he would most religiously have adhered to his oft expressed resolution, but with Dora dead he felt himself free to avail himself of the chance of happiness which presented itself to him.

Six months after he had seen that newspaper notice he sought Evelyn Arnthwaite's hand in marriage. Once, and once only, had he given expression to any doubt on the subject of Dora Armstrong's death. He and his chum were chatting together when he suddenly broached the subject.

"Tom," he said, "it's very strange my people have never mentioned Dora's death in their letters."

"Nothing strange about it, to my mind, old boy. It only shows their tact. They were afraid of stirring painful memories, and considered it best not to mention it, and if I were in your place I should say nothing of it to them. Let the dead past remain buried."

The subject was never mentioned again.

Jack was a promising young officer, and though he was not overburdened with wealth, he had quite enough of world's goods to enable him to support a wife.

Hence, when he approached his colonel as a suppliant for Evelyn's hand, that gentleman, who was not in the least a mercenary man, gave a ready consent. In a very short time Jack Edwards and Evelyn Arnthwaite were united, the reason of the short engagement being that the Colonel was retiring from the service and was going home to England.

Shortly after the wedding, at which Tom Burton most joyously assisted in the capacity of best man, the Colonel and his wife sailed for home, and Jack settled down to the enjoyment of his long deferred domestic bliss.

Evelyn was devoted to her husband, and he in turn displayed a great amount of affection for his wife, but all too soon their dream of bliss ended, and this was how it happened.

The new C.O. was expected and the officers of the station had assembled to meet him. The carriage containing the new chief and his wife came round a bend in the hills.

Jack Edwards and Tom Barton were of course among the group waiting to give them a hearty reception.

As the carriage came into view Jack focussed his glasses on the occupants. For a moment he gazed and then an exclamation startled Lieutenant Burton. Turning, he looked at his friend. He was white and agitated.

"What's the matter, Jack? You look as though you had seen a ghost."

"It is not a ghost, but a horrible reality," replied Jack hoarsely. "Dora Armstrong is in that carriage with the Colonel and his wife."

"What! you must be dreaming," said Burton.

"Would to God I were," he answered.

Lieutenant Burton seized the glasses and gazed intently at the rapidly approaching vehicle.

"Great Scott," he muttered. "What does it mean?"

Then he turned swiftly on Jack.

"Look here, old boy, forgive my seeming impertinence, but don't forget you are now the husband of another and a better woman, and for Heaven's sake pull yourself together."

Jack made an effort, and by the time the carriage arrived he had regained somewhat of his composure.

One by one the officers were introduced to their new chief, his wife and his wife's companion, for it was in this latter capacity Dora Armstrong had arrived in

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India, Jack was one of the last as he purposely delayed the meeting as long as possible.

He greatly rejoiced that a passing indisposition had kept his wife from this scene. He shook hands with the Colonel, was introduced to the Colonel's wife, and was just bracing himself for the ordeal of his meeting with Dora Armstrong, when that lady sprang forward:

"Why it's Jack—I mean Lieutenant Edwards!"

"What! have you two met before?" interposed the Colonel.

"We were acquainted in England, sir," replied Jack.

"Then I will leave you to escort Miss Armstrong to her new abode," said the C. O., and so saying he turned away, followed by his staff.

"You seem surprised to see me," remarked Dora.

"I—I thought you were dead," stammered Jack.

"Are you sure the wish was not father to the thought?"

"Perfectly sure. But I saw the announcement in the papers."

Dora laughed, and the laugh jarred upon Jack.

"That was my cousin."

"But the notice said: 'Dora Armstrong, only daughter of F. Armstrong Esq.' and the death took place at your home."

"Yes, my cousin, whose full name was Dorothy, was on a visit to us when she caught a chill and died."

"But how about the F. Armstrong and the only daughter? Was that a mistake?"

"No it was perfectly correct. Dorothy was the only daughter of Uncle Fred, and Frank is my father's name. Hence the similarity in the initals."

"It was a very unfortunate mistake."

"What! do you mean to say you wish the notice had referred to me?"

"No, I don't mean that. But let us change the subject."

"Very well. Tell me something of yourself."

"Well first of all, I suppose you have heard of my marriage?"

"You married?" ejaculated Dora. "Where is your wife?"

"She was unable to come with me to-day, owing to a slight indisposition."

"You must take me and give me an introduction."

Jack hesitated before replying. After a moment's thought he spoke.

"Let us be perfectly plain with each other, Miss Armstrong. In view of the past I would rather not. You will of course meet at some of the social functions of the station and I would prefer that the introduction came about in that way, and through some one else."

"Very well," replied Miss Armstrong coldly.

By this time they had reached her new home, and having thus done his duty, Jack excused himself and withdrew, a prey to conflicting emotions.

"Dora Armstrong alive and here," he soliloquised. "Why has Fate played this strange trick upon me?"

The fact of the matter was Jack Edwards realised that the old feeling was not dead, that the sight of Dora Armstrong's face had fanned into flame all the old love, and here he was married to another woman. In his perplexity he sought out his chum, Lieutenant Burton, listened gravely to his friends anxious remarks.

"It is truly a distressing position. You must not get too friendly with Dora Armstrong. On the other hand, if you cause her to hate you, I am afraid she will prove mischievous. You remember the poet's remark, 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned!'"

As he entered Dora flashed him a look of defiance.

Lieutenant Edwards groaned aloud.

"Come, old boy, cheer up. You must face the position like a man. You must crush down these feelings. There must be no disloyalty to your wife."

Edwards rose and went off to his own quarters.

As soon as he entered his wife noticed his agitated look.

"What is the matter, Jack?"

"I am not very well, dear. I think I shall go and lie down."

At that moment he could not talk to his wife.

Accordingly he withdrew to his own room and flung himself on the bed, but not to sleep, only to think.

His reveries were disturbed by the sound of voices in the outer room. Evidently there were visitors. A voice, which he knew too well broke upon his ear.

"Mrs. Edwards, I presume."

"Yes!" replied his wife, with a note of pride in her voice.

"I felt I must come and see you. Jack—I mean your husband and I were such great friends at home."

Jack shivered with apprehension. His wife knew nothing of her husband's earlier attachment.

He arose and joined the ladies. As he entered Dora flashed him a look of defiance.

"You see I have soon found you out," she said.

"Miss Armstrong informs me that you are old friends," interposed Evelyn.

"We *were* friends," replied Jack.

"Were friends?" said Dora.

"Yes! were, but that is past and I am surprised you should force yourself upon me here after what I said to you earlier in the day."

Dora flushed with anger. She had come out, think-

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ing to re-establish her sway over her old sweetheart. The news of his marriage had somewhat disconcerted and piqued her, although she had rejected him. After these words there was nothing more to be said. Her position there, was very embarrassing. Accordingly she withdrew, but as she did so, she fired a final shot:

"I am afraid residence in India has not improved your husband, Mrs. Edwards," she said as she turned to go. Neither husband nor wife replied, and she departed.

"Who is that woman, Jack?" asked Evelyn, when she had gone.

"We knew each other years ago, but she behaved so badly that it ended. To tell the truth we were once sweethearts, but now we are nothing to each other. In fact, until to-day I thought she was dead. Now, dear, let us say no more about her."

Thus the matter dropped.

Days and weeks passed by, Lieutenant Edwards and Dora Armstrong met each other occasionally, but there was no sign of further trouble and the officer's mind became easier again.

At last the blow fell.

Jack had been away for several days on an expedition. When he returned it was to find his wife absent, and a note was handed to him by his servant. It was brief, very brief.

"The enclosed will speak for itself," it said. "By the time you return I shall have reached the coast and have taken my passage home."

Jack reeled, and then feverishly read the enclosure. It was the note he had written after hearing of the break with the other man. By a fatal chance that note had been headed with nothing but the date. No address, no year was given, and the scorned woman had used it most unscrupulously.

"Dear Dora," it ran, "though I feel deeply hurt by your conduct, yet I still love you. Even though another has intervened, still there is no reason why we should not again be happy in each other's love. Until I know your feeling on the matter I will say no more, but it only needs a word from you to restore our old relations, Yours ever, Jack."

This was dated April 8th. It had been written three years before. The letter had evidently been most carefully preserved. It was now April 12th, but three years later. What a fiend the woman was. Truly "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned."

Jack dashed out of his quarters, and heedless of military etiquette he rushed into the Colonel's residence and demanded to be confronted with Miss Armstrong. The Colonel gazed in astonishment at the angry Lieutenant, but on hearing his explanation his face grew very grave.

"Miss Armstrong is dead," he answered. "She died two days ago from the effects of poison, self-administered. She had left a note for you, which I kept, as we were informed your wife had gone away for a few days to the coast. He brought the note. Jack seized it and feverishly tore it open. Its contents were the ravings of a maddened brain.

DEAR JACK,

After you wrote I found out how much I loved you, but it was also after my refusal. I came out here hoping to find you and again win your affection, but when you insulted me before your wife my love turned to hate and I determined to be revenged and then to die. Fate has given me the chance and I have taken it. Your wife believes you faithless and has left you. Now you will know what I felt when you scorned me.

DORA.

This time Jack acted promptly. The Colonel granted him the necessary leave at once and he immediately set off for the coast. There he ascertained that his wife had not sailed for England. In fact she was lying dangerously ill with brain fever at an hotel. Jack was shown into her room and as he saw her altered appearance he flung himself down by the bedside in agony. Now, his wife occupied his whole heart and he fervently prayed that she might not be lost to him. For several days her life hung in the balance. Then consciousness returned, but with the first returning gleams, the doctor insisted upon Jack retiring until he had prepared his patient for the interview. The next meeting between husband and wife was a touching one. Forgiveness was mutually asked and given, and when Evelyn had fully regained her strength, they returned to the station, where they received an ovation.

Lieutenant Burton was the first to greet them. Clasping his chum's hand, he said with deep fervour: "Thank God, the plot failed!"

Jack looked more than he could say, and thenceforward the current of his life ran smoothly.

JOHN HENRY PEAT.

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SHORT STORIES THAT MAKE YOU LAUGH.

The Prize of One Guinea for the best Storyette has been won this week by Mr. F. W. FINCH, of 236 Leicester Causeway, Coventry.

Quite Simple.

PATRICK is a big policeman whose good humour and promptness in emergencies have endeared him to the people in the district over which he is a guardian angel.

One day he noticed that a street workman was leaving an unsightly pile of gravel at the side of the road.

"Come, now, you can't leave that heap there," said Patrick sternly.

"Well, I've no place to put it," said the workman.

"You can't leave it there," persisted Patrick.

"What'll I do with it, then?" asked the workman, sullenly.

"Do with it!" echoed Patrick. "Dig a hole in the road, to be sure, man, and bury it!" F. W. F.

At a Classical Concert.

ONE item was a septet, the general idea of which, to my untrained ears, seemed to be that the seven instruments were engaged on the contract of levelling a musical scrap heap. The foreman on the job had evidentally been called away, consequently the instruments had it all their own way. For a few minutes they would go shovelling away at the heap in a promiscuous go-as-you-please style.

Then the clarionet and the fiddle would challenge each other as to which could load his barrow first, and the crochets and semi-quavers fairly flew, while the rest of the instruments stood round, and the flute saw fair play. Bye-and-by, when the fiddle seemed to be having the worst of it, you could hear the 'cello spit on his hands, so to speak, and go in to help it, while the clarionet accidentally dropped a shovelful of accidentals on to the toes of the double bass, which caused it to growl and swear in a way that ought not to be allowed.

Thus the work went on. At first it was interesting, but soon it became wearisome. At the end of twenty minutes, by which time the septet didn't seem to have worked any particular diminution on the scrap heap, I went outside to smoke until they had completed the job and swept up, and I forgot to return. G. E. G.

Thick-Skinned.

A DEESIDE laird was out shooting one day, accompanied by his gamekeeper. Excelling as a *litterateur*, the laird was a desperately poor shot, but his gamekeeper was an adept at framing excuses for his master's misses. Having fired a considerable number of shots to no purpose, a rabbit bounded out of a bush a few feet from where the laird was standing.

"Noo, sir, tak' time, and let her have it," said the gamekeeper.

Bang, bang. Two shots rang out, but still the rabbit maintained its onward course, and was soon out of sight.

"Confound it all," muttered the laird.

"Weel, sir," was the keeper's reply, "that brute must have had a deevilish thick hide." C. F.

Irish Again.

MRS. O'GRADY: "Good evening, Mrs. M'Ginnes, how is your husband to-day?"

Mrs. M'Ginnes: "Sure, and he's but poorly, thank goodness, and—oh, be jabers, there's the clock strikin', and I must go and wake him to give him his slapin' draught." E. L.

Smart Reply.

A SHORT time ago a boy fresh from school started work at a factory. Being late three successive mornings, he was discharged. The following morning the foreman was greatly surprised to find the boy at work, and going to him said: "I thought I told you not to come back."

"Yes," replied the boy, "and don't you do it again. I got a jolly good hiding when I told father."

E. R.

Rather Nasty.

A MAN who does not mind a joke at his own expense says he went into a chemist's recently, and asked for some morphine. The assistant objected to giving it without a prescription.

"Do I look like a man who would kill himself?" the customer asked.

"I don't know, I'm sure," said the assistant, "but if I looked like you I should be tempted."

C. R. F.

A True Bill.

"IF you were a—a jury, Clara," said the embarrassed young lawyer, hesitatingly, "I could plead my cause with more self-possession. In the courts of—er—of love I don't think I can claim to be a first class advocate."

"Perhaps you have not had an extensive practice in such courts, William," suggested the maiden, softly.

"That's it, exactly, Clara," eagerly rejoined the young man, moving his chair a little nearer. "I'm a new hand at this business. But if I could feel sure the jury——"

"Yes."

"Wasn't prejudiced against the advocate——"

"Yes."

"Why, then, I might——"

"What kind of a jury do you consider me, William?" she asked with eyes downcast.

"A—h'm—common jury, of course. You couldn't be a grand jury, you know, darl——"

"Why not?"

"Because I don't plead before grand juries."

"I think, William," said the young girl, blushing, "I would rather for this occasion be considered a grand jury."

"Why?"

"Because," and she hid her face somewhere in the vicinity of his coat-collar, "I have found a 'true Bill!'" J. J. McC.

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A VICTIM OF VERBOSITY.

Too well I know the awful truth. For weeks I have been an object of commiseration to my friends, and the burden of my life has well-nigh pressed down my sinking frame. Reason is tottering on her throne, but ere she is finally and possibly for ever unseated and I descend into the black and awful darkness of drivelling idiocy, or maybe, raving insanity, let me endeavour to state for the benefit of my contemporaries and successors, the circumstances which have reduced me to this deplorable condition.

Until a comparatively short time ago I could as fairly and confidently claim to be "clothed and in my right mind," as any man, and would have defied each and every member of the Lunacy Board, individually and collectively to have found the slightest trace of a disturbance of my mental equilibrium. Now, alas! I have been weighed in the balances and found wanting, and if, when my beclouded life has reached its termination there should be any among my legatees who may consider themselves aggrieved by the smallness of the portion of this world's goods, which my last will and testament directs shall be apportioned unto them, I can with confidence look forward to the Courts being called upon to decide whether the testator—my unfortunate self—was in a condition, when that document was drafted, to properly dispose of the property therein named.

Having thus, in the foregoing preamble, endeavoured to state with all lucidity of expression remaining at my command, my present condition, I will now proceed to explain the reason of the catastrophe which has come upon me with overwhelming force.

But if the succeeding narrative should be marred by vagueness of term and mediocrity of expression, I beg that my readers will make every allowance which a sympathetic nature would prompt in view of the circumstances under which the recital of my misfortunes is penned, and that, even though the narrative may come under their condemnation, they will yet spare a pitying thought and a kindly word for the victim who in sending out this narrative to the world writes "Finis" to his labours and whose only wish is to thenceforward sink into oblivion and forgetfulness.

Now to my story.

I am as yet only in the heyday of my youth and had looked forward to a happy and possibly prosperous career, ending in a ripe old age amongst my friends. It is not necessary for the purposes of this story that I should weary my readers with the details of my life in its earlier periods. These were commonplace and uneventful and can therefore be at once dismissed. I had ambitions in a certain direction.

I was desirous of achieving fame and possibly fortune in the world of literature and with this end in view I commenced work upon a book, which I fondly hoped would at least lay the foundation of my future reputation. I gave much anxious thought and care to this work.

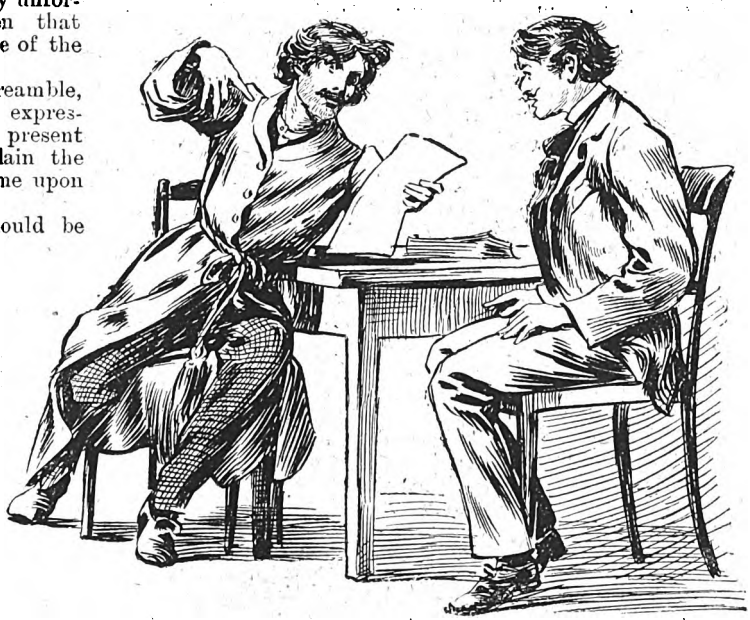
Page after page I wrote, chapter after chapter was concluded.

Early and late I racked my brain in order to clothe my characters in suitable dress.

Many and many were the pages of manuscript which I penned only to destroy. At times I despaired of even being able to bring my labours to a satisfactory conclusion, but I stuck doggedly to my purpose, until at last the arduous task was completed and I looked with pride upon the finished creation of my brain.

At this juncture a friend—I still call him such, for I am loath to believe that it was with malice prepense that he acted—introduced me to an individual whom he described as a brother *litterateur*, thus pandering to my vanity.

Though my work had not as yet received the seal of approbation from the stern critics who sit in the seat of the literary judgement hall, though my manuscript had not even been submitted to a single publisher, I had unbound confidence in the merits of my production and its ultimate success. Consequently it was only natural that before I had been long in the company of this individual that I should modestly hint that I had written a story, and that I should esteem myself very highly favoured if my more experienced brother would do me the honour of reading and criticising my production.



"What you require is diction, my young friend, diction!"

Here, in a nutshell, lies the story of my undoing. If

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requested criticism, if he had even hurt my pride by hinting that he could not afford to waste his time over the crude effusions of inexperienced literary aspirants, the story of my life would not have contained the gloomy pages which I now inscribe. But, unfortunately, when my request was preferred Mr. Ellison most graciously—at least, so it then appeared to me—expressed his willingness to give me the benefit of his matured experience, and from that moment I felt that the success of my story was a foregone conclusion.

Though the incident may appear to the average reader somewhat commonplace, I cannot refrain from retailing it as showing what manner of man the Fates had brought me in contact with. As is well know it is a thoroughly English custom when men meet for the first time, and indulge in a few minutes' conversation, for them to further cement the acquaintance by an adjournment to some neighbouring hostelry. In due observance of this time-honoured custom I made the usual suggestion.

"Will you come and have a drink?" said I.

Mr. Ellison's reply was, as I subsequently ascertained to my cost, characteristic of the man.

"My young friend," he replied, "although I am an individual who is singularly, if not conspicuously abstemious in the matter of alcoholic refreshment, and have an extreme abhorrence of the undue indulgence of the bibulous inclinations, yet I am distinctly of opinion that the present meeting is of a sufficiently auspicious nature as to justify me in quaffing a goblet of the inebriating fluid. Therefore, it is with extreme pleasure that I shall accept the invitation so genially extended to me, and shall now propose an adjournment to the Bacchanalian resort, where we will drink to your ultimate and enduring success, coupling with it the hope that when you have climbed the giddy heights and stand on the topmost pinnacle of the temple of Fame, you will not be overcome by the altitude to which you have attained."

This lengthy speech in response to a simple invitation appealed strongly to my sense of the ridiculous, and I had some difficulty in controlling my risible faculties, but as I had no wish to offend my new acquaintance I repressed my merriment.

The following day, by arrangement with the gentleman who had thus become my literary adviser, I took my precious manuscript round to his residence and was desired by him to call upon him a week later. Ere I left his abode he put several questions to me.

"Before I enter upon the perusal of your maiden effort, my young friend," he said, "let me ask you whether you really desire a fair and honest criticism irrespective of what the result may be."

"Most certainly I do," I replied.

"Very well. I can assure you I shall be neither hypercritical nor censorious. If your work merits condemnation I shall make my pronouncement as unhesitatingly and plainly as I should were it the reverse, though it would give me infinitely more pleasure to eulogise than to condemn. In either case, however, it will be in your own interests that I should speak."

I warmly thanked Mr. Ellison and withdrew with a greatly enhanced admiration for him. Seven days later I called with some trepidation to hear sentence pronounced.

When I was shown into my friend's study I found him seated with my manuscript in front of him.

"You will observe that I am in readiness for your visit, my young friend," he remarked, "I am rejoiced to find that you have apparently inculcated the virtue of punctuality. My pet aversion is the person who in failing to keep his engagement at the time appointed, thereby encroaches on my time, and thus, as time is money, deprives me of a certain proportion of the currency of the realm. Now to the consideration of your work."

I set to work to remodel it.

"What is your decision concerning it?" I asked eagerly.

"Steady, my young friend, steady. We must proceed to the consideration of this subject with patience and deliberation."

Curbing my impatience as well as I could I waited for the verdict, in the meantime endeavouring to gain some idea as to whether the criticism I was about to receive was adverse or favourable, from Mr. Ellison's face, but his countenance was as impassive and inscrutable as a sphinx. At last the oracle spoke:

"After carefully and conscientiously perusing the work which you submitted to me I have come to the conclusion that you are endowed with considerable literary ability."

A gratified smile overspread my face, which, unlike my mentor's countenance, was very much of an open book, which he easily read, as his following remarks indicated.

"I am glad that I am able, in communicating my decision, to preface the detailed criticism with a general expression which is of such a nature as to give you some pleasure, as it will subsequently be my duty—you will observe I use the word duty, for I am conscientiously directed in these matters—to say certain things which may give you pain, though I trust you will treat my words as you would the surgeon's knife which inflicts a momentary punishment in order to

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remove the danger of serious complications and possibly a fatal termination."

"I am quite sure I shall take your criticism in the spirit in which it is given," I replied.

"Well spoken, my young friend," he exclaimed. "Had I discovered in you any indication of resentment prompted by wounded vanity my interest in you would have evaporated, and I should, without any compunction, have abandoned you to your flounderings in the whirlpool of folly, even though it might result in your eventually being engulfed in the vortex of an overweening confidence and unreasoning vanity."

I began to wonder when the real business upon which we were met would be reached, for to tell the truth, my patience was getting exhausted and my friend's long speeches were beginning to weary me. At last to my intense relief he approached the subject.

"In the first place, I can heartily congratulate you on the conception of your plot. It is most daringly and ingeniously contrived and is highly creditable to your inventive genius. It bristles with originality which is, of course, highly commendable. The grouping of your characters is also good. Thus far, I have only referred to the qualities which would recommend your work. Now I come to the defects. Though your plot and the grouping of your characters, are, as I have said, good, yet there is one point which would effectually damn your story in the eyes of the public, were it permitted to get into circulation in its present form. I am afraid it will be necessary to entirely rewrite the book before you can with any degree of confidence submit it to any publisher. What you require is diction, my young friend, diction," and as he spoke he brought his hand down on his desk heavily as though to emphasise his remark.

"Your language is at present commonplace. Your dialogue is lacking in pungency. You must make it more piquant and pleasing. You must crystallise your ideas and stamp your characters with individuality, but above all you must express yourself forcibly. I repeat, what you require is diction. For instance take this paragraph," and as he spoke he turned over the leaves of the manuscript. "Now, listen while I read it to you and then I will read you a paraphrase of that paragraph. Here is your wording," and he commenced to read.

"Ella Godfrey was the first to descend to the breakfast room and she passed the time of waiting for the other members of the family in watching the falling snow, which, during the night, had effected a transformation. As yet the snow was untrodden and Ella thought how beautiful it looked and sighed almost regretfully at the idea of its being converted into dirt and slush. 'How like the lives of many of our unfortunate fellow creatures,' she soliloquised. She was prevented from moralising further by the entry of the other members of the family, and in a few minutes the clatter of crockery and the jingle of the other table requisites showed that breakfast was being discussed.

"Now my object in selecting this particular paragraph is because it is one of the simplest and least important in the book. In fact it could be eliminated without detracting from the narrative. But this same paragraph well handled can be made the basis of a splendid moral lesson and become forcible and brilliant. I have rewritten it on a separate sheet. Here it is.

"On the following morning the first to break the spell of somnolence was Ella Godfrey. With celerity and dexterity she completed her preparations and descended to the breakfast room to await the arrival of those who were still wooing the drowsy god. During the time the thick mantle of darkness had enshrouded the earth, its face had undergone a complete transformation and Ella looked forth upon a pure white, gleaming and glistening expanse of country. The feathery crystals were still descending, and as yet they had not been despoiled of their pristine purity by the foot of man. As the fair girl's gaze rested upon the scene, and she meditated on its probable appearance in the course of but a few fleeting hours she started a train of thought. 'How like the lives of many of our fellow mortals,' she mused. 'Now the fleecy covering presents a most attractive appearance and I can find myself in entire sympathy with the writer from whose pen we received that simple, yet grand poem commencing, "Snow, snow, beautiful snow," but ere long the attractiveness and the purity will have departed, leaving only a mire, repulsive in its aspect. Thus many a wrecked life, many a degraded soul, many a sunken wretch, has once possessed the attributes which go to make up the pure, noble and dignified image of the great

I was fairly staggered by this pronouncement.

Creator, but by contact with the impure, the ignoble and the debased, has lost all that life made attractive and beautiful.' Ella's reveries were disturbed at this point by the entry of the less energetic members of the family circle, and ere long the delayed meal was in progress."

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There is no need to weary my readers with further details. Suffice it to say that my manuscript was literally torn to shreds in this fashion. I took it home again and immediately set to work to remodel it in accordance with the suggestions of my friend.

It was a herculean task and involved much anxious thought and much weariness of mind, but at last it was completed.

There was no opportunity of again submitting it for criticism to Mr. Ellison, as he was abroad, so I despatched it to a publishing firm.

During the period of waiting—and it was a fairly long one—I endeavoured to cultivate the style of expression which characterised the rewritten manuscript, with the object of improving my diction.

The simplicity which had previously characterised my conversation and writing gradually vanished to such extremes did I go, that I sincerely believe that during that period no friend ever received a written communication from me without having to apply to his dictionary for assistance in arriving at my meaning.

In ordinary converse I plumed myself upon the fact—for such I supposed it to be—that I was in a fair way for establishing a reputation as a brilliant conversationalist.

I have subsequently learned that I was looked upon by my long-suffering friends as a most intolerable bore, who was endeavouring to establish a record in the use of unnecessarily lengthy words.

* * * * *

At last the verdict of the publishers was pronounced upon my work. It came in the form of a letter with which my manuscript was enclosed. I think I cannot do better than give the letter in full. It was as follows:

> Dear Sir,—We have read your story, which bears marks of decided literary talent. Your plot is an excellent one and you have shown some discrimination in the selection of your characters, but we cannot accept it in its present form. We do not wish to hurt your feelings, but rather to assist you, if possible, as we are of opinion that you can do much better than this. Were you to re-write your story in plain, simple language, instead of employing the grandiloquent expressions and exaggerated phraseology, which now make it appear stilted and unnatural, we are of opinion that it would have a fair chance of success. If you care to adopt our suggestion and again send it on to us, we shall be pleased to give it further consideration— Yours faithfully,
>
> Watkins, Mills and Hampson.

I was fairly staggered by this pronouncement, but as I was naturally anxious to get my work published, I at once decided that if Messrs Watkins, Mills and Hampson preferred the simple style, I would proceed with the revision with the utmost despatch. Accordingly I began, but it was all of no use. Like King Charles's head in Mr. Dick's narrative the exaggerated phrase would creep in.

For weeks I endeavoured to revert to the former style, but it was all of no avail, until now my friends say my condition is so serious that it is absolutely necessary that I should be taken where I can have perfect rest and quiet.

I understand them perfectly.

The light of reason is not finally extinguished and I know, from hints which they have let drop, that they contemplate placing me in a private asylum in order that I may have the benefit of a celebrated brain specialist's treatment.

* * * * *

Poor Charlie! we parted with him yesterday, and it now devolves upon me, as his most intimate chum, to complete the narrative he began. We had all been greatly interested in the book which he was writing and looked forward to its ultimate publication.

All went well up to a certain point and I thoroughly believe that had it not been for what turned out to be a most disastrous meeting, his book would have been a success.

Just when he had completed it he was introduced to another literary man, whom, I am grateful to be able to say I have never met, and whom I hope I never shall meet. This man was evidently cursed with—if I may use the expression—a strong weakness.

I have since heard it said of him that he could and did use more words of six syllables than any other man breathing.

Upon that I am, of course, unable to speak with any degree of definiteness, but I do know that poor Charlie's trouble dates almost from the time he made Mr. Ellison's acquaintance. It was after an interview with this man Ellison, that he came home and commenced to re-write his manuscript in language which was perfectly absurd in its verbosity, and those of us who were permitted to see it from time to time were unanimously of opinion that it was foredoomed to failure, and subsequent events only proved too truly the correctness of our prognostications.

When we attempted to remonstrate with him on the subject he simply informed us that our ignorance of the requirements of modern fiction alone excused our interference.

"It's diction, Fred, my boy, diction that provides the element of success in present day literature," he once said to me.

And diction was his undoing. From being one of the most entertaining of men he became a most intolerable bore and a laughing stock to his friends because of the extravagance of his speech, which he would inflict upon us in his endeavours to extend his vocabulary.

As we all anticipated, his work was rejected. This was a heavy blow to him, and in his endeavours to correct it he worked so feverishly and made such enormous demands upon his reserve of strength and his mental faculties that eventually his brain gave way and it became necessary to place him in a private asylum. His case is not looked upon as hopeless, but for the present there he remains a victim of verbosity.

J. P.

?

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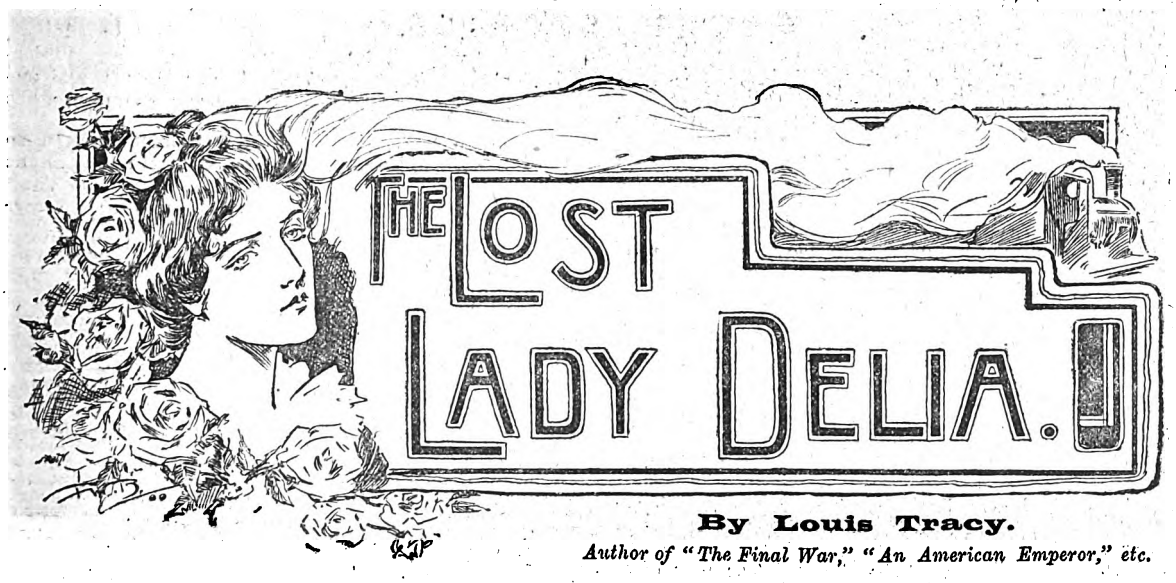

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

THIS TELLS THE STORY FROM THE START.

Lady Delia Lyle leaves her house one foggy November afternoon, saying she is going to see her sister at Richmond, but from that time she is not heard of.

Her husband, Sir Charles Lyle, puts the matter into the hands of detectives, Inspector Winter taking charge of the case.

Reginald Brett, a barrister friend of the Lyles, also promises to do all he can, and he finds out that Lady Delia, on the night of her disappearance, instead of going to Richmond, alighted at Sloane Square, and went to a block of flats called Raleigh Mansions.

Towards the end of the month the body of a woman, evidently murdered, is found wedged beneath a drain-pipe in the Thames at Putney, and, though Sir Charles does not identify the body, Brett imagines it to be that of Lady Delia. Shortly after this discovery Lady Delia's maid, Jane Harding, disappears. She is afterwards found to have gone on the stage.

Brett now starts investigations at Raleigh Mansions, and he fixes on two residents there as being likely to have been connected with Lady Delia. These are a Mr. Sydney H. Pyne, who is not at present in residence, and a Mrs. Hillmer, whom he finds to be Pyne's sister.

It had transpired that Pyne had gone to Monte Carlo, and thither Brett goes, and he discovers that though letters are addressed to Pyne at the Hotel du Cercle he is not known there.

During his stay at Monte Carlo Brett becomes acquainted with an Englishman, named Albert Mensmore, whom he helps out of some money difficulties, but he does not discover anything about Pyne.

After his return Brett finds out that Sir Charles Lyle knows Albert Mensmore, but in what connection does not transpire.

A few days later Brett goes into the City, to the office of Dodge and Co., with whom he had had some speculative dealings, and from remarks made by Mr. Dodge, he thinks that Pyne and Mensmore must be one and the same man. In the evening Brett and Winter go to Raleigh Mansions and search the flat occupied by Pyne. Brett finds that a piece of one of the fire-dogs is missing, and that it exactly corresponds with the piece of iron which was found imbedded in the head of the body found at Putney.

He again visits Mrs. Hillmer, who is terrified by his inquiries, and this seems to strengthen suspicion against her brother.

It is shown by this time that Mensmore (who is at Genoa) had previously adopted the name of Pyne. The real Pyne (his mining partner) writes him that their property is likely to bring them much wealth.

CHAPTER XVIII. *(continued)*.

There was quite a large gathering for dinner. Places like Genoa contain a number of highly-interesting personages if the visitor can only get to know them. The British race produces a richer variety of human flotsam and jetsam than any other. These derelicts come to anchor in out-of-the-way parts of the earth. They seem to have been everywhere and have done everything, whilst the whole world is an open book to them.

Thus there was no lack of variety in the conversation, and, as usual in such assemblies, it dealt more with persons than with incidents.

Phyllis had arranged the guests, so it may be taken for granted that her lover was near her—in fact, he sat exactly opposite. The lady he took in to dinner was the wife of an English doctor, and the British consul at the port was Miss Browne's table companion.

The consul was a chatty man, who kept himself well informed concerning society events.

"By the way," he said to Phyllis, "did you ever meet Lady Delia Lyle?"

"No, her name is not familiar to me."

"Do you mean the wife of Sir Charles Lyle?" said Mensmore; and the sudden interest he evinced caused Phyllis to glance at him wonderingly.

"Yes that is she."

"I know Sir Charles well. What is there new about his wife?"

"She is dead."

"Good Heavens! Dead! When, and how?"

Mensmore was so obviously agitated that others present noticed it, and Phyllis marvelled much that in all their confidences the name of Lyle had never escaped his lips.

The consul, too, was a little upset by the sensation caused by his words.

"I fear," he said, "that I have blurted out the fact rather unguardedly. The Lyles are friends of yours?"

"No, no, not in that sense. Sir Charles I have known for many years. But are you sure his wife is dead?"

"My authority is an announcement in the *Times*, to hand by to-day's post. I should not have mentioned it were not Lady Delia so well known in society, and the affair is peculiar, to say the least."

"Peculiar—how?"

In his all-absorbing interest at the consul's statement, Mensmore paid no heed to the curious looks directed at him by those near, for he had become very pale, and was more excited in manner than the circumstances appeared to warrant.

"In this sense. The paper is the issue of January 28, yet the notice says that Lady Delia died on November 6. That is odd, is it not? A woman of her position could hardly have quitted life so quietly that no one would trouble to publish the fact for nearly three months after the event."

"It is extraordinary—inexplicable?"

"Did you know Lady Delia personally, Bertie?" put in Phyllis timorously.

The question restored Mensmore to some sense of his surroundings.

"I have never even seen her," he said, trying desperately to be commonplace; "but her husband is an old schoolfellow of mine, and I have heard much of both of them since their marriage. I am quite shocked by the news."

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"I can only repeat my regret for having spoken of it so carelessly," said the polite consul.

"Oh, I am glad to know of it since it has happened. Poor Lady Delia! How strange that she should die."

Phyllis had the tact to change the conversation, and Mensmore gradually recovered his self-possession. A woman's eyes are keener than a man often gives her credit for; and Phyllis could see quite well that after the first effect of the news had passed, it, in some indefinable way, seemed to have a good effect on her lover. But if a woman's intuition is seldom at fault her reasoning faculties are narrow.

Trying to arrive at a solution of the mystery attending Mensmore's behaviour, Phyllis suddenly became hot all over.

She felt furiously and inordinately jealous of a woman she had never seen, and who was admittedly dead before Mensmore and she herself had met.

Hence her nose went high in the air when Bertie claimed her for the first dance.

"Who is this Lady Delia in whom you are so deeply interested?" she said, pulling him off beneath a sheltering awning.

"As I said," replied Mensmore, "she is the wife of an old acquaintance of mine."

"But you must have been very fond of her to feel so keenly when you heard of her death?"

"Fond of her! I have never, to my knowledge, laid eyes on her."

"Oh!" and the tone was somewhat mollified. "Then why did you look so worried during dinner?"

"Simply because I know Sir Charles."

"What a dear sympathetic little boy you are! When I die, Bertie, I suppose you will drop down stiff from grief at once."

"Don't talk nonsense. We are missing all this delightful music."

And they whirled off down the snowy deck, forgetful of all things save one, that they were in love.

Now, what a pity it was that Brett did not happen to be on board the *White Heather* that night.

Many complications, and not a little misery, would have been avoided thereby.

CHAPTER XIX.

Where Mrs. Hillmer Went.

Sir Charles Lyle, in sending off the hurried announcement of his wife's death, forgot the "society" papers.

Such a promising topic did not come in their way every week, and they made the most of it. Where did Lady Delia die? when did she die? under what circumstances did she die? They rolled the morsel under their tongues in every conceivable manner.

Details were not forthcoming.

"Our representative" called at Wensley House, Portman Square, but was informed that Sir Charles was in Yorkshire. Inquiry by a local reporter from Sir Charles in person elicited no information. "Lady Delia is dead," wrote this enterprising journalist; "of that there can be no manner of doubt, but her husband states that for family reasons he is unable to supply the public with the precise facts concerning his wife's demise."

This ill-advised authentic statement only fanned the flame. An evening journal got hold of the proceedings at the Putney Coroner's-court which inquired into the death of the woman found in the Thames, and, with a portentous display of headlines, published interviews with the doctor giving particulars of the iron spike found imbedded in the skull.

The paper was also able to state "on the best authority" that at this inquest Sir Charles Lyle and the missing lady's personal maid were called in to identify the body but failed.

A first-class sensation was in full swing and threatened to reach the question stage in the House of Commons when Brett took hold of affairs.

He went to Sir Charles Lyle's solicitors, and induced them to send out the following authoritative communiqué to the Press:

Much unnecessary pain is being caused to Sir Charles Lyle and to the relatives of his late wife by the comments which have appeared in many newspapers regarding Lady Delia Lyle's death. Her ladyship left her home on November 6th to pay a visit to her sister at Richmond, and since that date has not been seen or heard of. There was no possible reason for Lady Delia's disappearance. After a long and agonising search, her husband and relatives have come to the conclusion that she met with some accident on the date named, with the result that her identity was not established and she was probably buried from some hospital or other institution long before her friends seriously entertained the thought that she was dead. Every such case of accidental death followed by the interment of unknown persons by the authorities, occuring on or about November 6th, has since been rigidly investigated, but no definite trace has been found of the missing lady. Sir Charles Lyle finally determined to take the public step of announcing his wife's death in the hope that any hitherto undiscovered clue might thereby come to light. But there are no grounds to suppose that any other explanation of the occurrence than that given will be forthcoming. The investigation has throughout been in the hands of Scotland Yard, so no good purpose can be served by further discussion in the Press of what is now, and threatens to remain, a mystery rendered more complex probably by the simplicity of its leading features.

Several newspapers, of course, pointed out that they were helping forward the inquiry by noising it abroad, but thenceforth the paragraphs ceased, being eclipsed in interest by the revelations of a great divorce case in which there were no less than six titled co-respondents.

One man was much puzzled by the original obituary notice and the semi-official statement supplied by the solicitors.

Mr. Winter did not know what to make of them. He guessed that Brett had inspired the "explanation," and he read many times the final sentence.

"It threatens to remain a mystery, does it?" he murmured. "Just wait, Mr. Brett, until I lay my hands on Pyne. Clever as you are, I think I will show you that Scotland Yard can occasionally get the better of your theories. Anyhow, Pyne will have to be very explicit about his movements before I am satisfied that he knows nothing about this business."

He had written to the Chief of Police at New York, and something definite would soon come to hand.

Nevertheless, he felt somewhat shaken in his diagnosis of the crime. Wyoming was a long way from London, and the letter from Pyne, which he had in his possession, did not exactly confirm his suspicion that this man was concerned in the murder of Lady Delia.

He quickly became aware of Mrs. Hillmer's departure, and at once jumped to the conclusion that she had recently left England for the United States.

A close scrutiny of the passage lists at Liverpool and Southampton did not help him much, and he ultimately resolved to call on Brett, in the hope that a chance exclamation might reveal the barrister's opinion of the situation.

Reggie was not at a loss to account for Mr. Winter's presence.

"I expected you," he said.

"Really now, may I ask why, sir?"

"Because you have missed Mrs. Hillmer, and you want me to help you to find out where she has gone, and why."

The detective smiled.

"I won't say that you are wrong, sir," he cried. "In these affairs it is always well to keep an eye on the woman, you know."

"When did Mrs. Hillmer leave Raleigh Mansions?"

"On the 30th."

"It is now February 3. Four days ago, eh?"

"That's the time. She might have left by the American line from Southampton or the Cunard from Liverpool on Wednesday, but she did not, and no one answering to her description is booked by the White Star to-morrow."

"Southampton! Liverpool! Do you think she has gone to America?"

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"Where else? She's in league with Pyne, somehow, of that I am certain, and I think that the Monte Carlo address for the letters was a mere blind—a clever one, too, as it even deceived you, Mr. Brett."

"Yes. It did deceive me."

"Then why are you so surprised at the suggestion that the lady should attempt to cross the Atlantic?"

"Because I have not your rapid perception of the points of a case."

"That's your way of pulling my leg, Mr. Brett."

The barrister smiled.

Mrs Hillmer, of course, had gone to Monte Carlo. Once there she would not have much difficulty in tracing the *White Heather*, and overtaking Mensmore.

She would warn him of the police pursuit, and there would be a scene between them.

How would it result? Would Mensmore, guilty, seek safety in flight? Would he, innocent, return to London and demand to be confronted with his accusers?

For the life of him, Brett could not say positively. Yet he felt that the situation was too delicate to be dealt with by Mr. Winter's bludgeon methods, and he forbore to speak.

The detective interpreted his silence as an admission of inability to find a satisfactory explanation of Mrs. Hillmer's absence.

He went on:

"Pyne is not at Monte Carlo."

"So I imagined."

"Well, it is a fact. The police have made constant inquiries for him at the Hotel du Cercle and elsewhere. Not the slightest trace of him can be found."

"I was there myself, you know."

"Yes, sir. I have not forgotten that. But it shows what a clever rascal the fellow is in concealing his identity. However, he could never have counted upon my discovering that letter of his. Even if he is not in America we shall get some reliable data to go upon in answer to my queries."

"There I fully agree with you. You will have done a great deal if you thoroughly clear up the mystery regarding Pyne. May I ask you to let me know the result?"

"With pleasure, sir. And now, can I request a favour in return?"

"Certainly."

"Tell me, then, what is, in your opinion, the best way to find Mrs. Hillmer?"

Brett did not expect to be thus openly challenged on the matter. It was one thing to withhold his own theories and discoveries from this representative of the majesty of the law, but quite another to refuse to help forward a detective with whom he was nominally working.

Besides, Mrs. Hillmer had four days start. It would take some time—possibly a telegram would not be sufficiently explicit—to obtain the desired assistance from the Continental police. Yes, in this instance Mensmore must take his chance.

"If I were you," said Brett, slowly weighing his words, "I would inquire at the Continental booking-offices at Victoria and Charing Cross, and from the guards in charge of the morning mail trains on the 30th. In fact, it would be quite safe for you to wire the authorities at Monte Carlo, asking if Mrs. Hillmer is not now at the Hotel du Cercle."

The detective started as though he had been shot.

"What!" he cried, "you think she is there all the time?"

"I think she has been there since Wednesday morning."

"That's what I mean. Why did you not tell me sooner?"

"Because you never asked me. And now, Mr. Winter, one word of advice. Go slow."

"It's all jolly fine telling me to go slow when I have no

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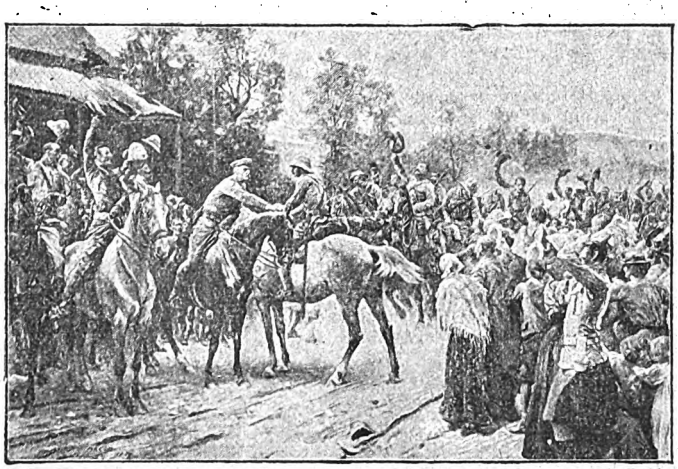

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reason to go fast. The case even against Pyne is shadowy enough at present."

"Exactly. Wait until you can grasp a substance."

"I will, sir," said Winter, jamming his hat on; "but when I lay my hands on Pyne I will grip him hard enough."

It took Mr. Winter all that day to satisfy himself that Mrs. Hillmer had really booked for the Riviera by the Club-train from Charing Cross on the preceding Monday.

Just as he had verified the fact, came a reply from the Monte Carlo police:

Mrs. Hillmer arrived at Hotel du Cercle on Wednesday. Left for Italy same afternoon. Shall we endeavour to trace her?

"Oh, bother," growled Mr. Winter. "Pyne may be in Jerusalem by this time. And here have I been fussing about Wyoming or some other potato patch in the Far West."

However, he wired again to Monte Carlo.

Yes. Locate Mrs. Hillmer, if possible. I will then telegraph instructions to local police.

When this message had gone he felt easier in his mind. The chase was at least getting warm.

"I cannot arrest him yet," he reflected; "but if I once get fairly on his track, I will not lose sight of him again if I can help it. I suppose it will mean a trip to Italy for me. I must lay the evidence before the Treasury to see if a warrant is justified."

Two days passed without incident.

Late on Sunday evening, February 5th, a continental telegram was handed to him at Scotland Yard.

Mrs. Hillmer's present address, Hotel Imperiale, Florence.

He promptly wired the chief of police at Florence:

Keep Mrs. Hillmer, English visitor, Hotel Imperiale, under surveillance. Also watch her associates, particularly Englishman named Pyne, if there. Letter follows.

"That's a good stroke of business," said Mr. Winter when the message had gone. "Now we shan't be long."

It was in quite a contented mood that he lit a cigar on the steps of his office, and prepared to start home for dinner but a messenger with the badge of the Commercial Cable Company in Northumberland Avenue bustled past him.

"Who's the cable for, boy?" said the detective.

"Winter, Scotland Yard," was the answer.

"That's me."

He tore open the envelope and found that the contents were coded, but he caught the word "Pyne" amidst the unintelligible jumble.

With considerable display of excitement he rushed into the office to find the A.B.C. Code, and after some confusion in deciphering the words, this was what he read:

Regret delay in replying to your communication. Pyne left New York in *White Star* steamer due Liverpool February 4th.

"February 4th? Why, that's yesterday. Good gracious, he's here all the time. Well of all the——"

But exclamations were useless. Calling another plain-clothes man to accompany him, Mr. Winter drove off in mad haste to Sloane Square.

About an hour later Brett received a typewritten slip gummed on to a telegraph form. It was from Florence and ran as follows:

My brother wildly excited regarding allegations. We start for London to-night. Meanwhile fearful complications expected. Mr. Pyne of Wyoming, my brother's friend, is probably occupying his flat, and may be arrested. We both trust to you to save him. Wire us at Modane or Gare du Nord. Gwendoline Hillmer.

So Brett also rushed off in a hansom to Sloane Square.

CHAPTER XX.

Mr. Sydney H. Pyne.

Mr. Winter glanced at Brett's chambers whilst passing through Victoria Street.

"I wonder what he would think if he knew what we are after," he said to his colleague, one of the two who accompanied him when Brett was arrested by mistake.

"What are we after?" said the policeman.

"This time we're going to nail the right Pyne," was the answer.

"Will we cart him off?"

"Well, now, that depends. I think I am quite right in collaring him unless he explains things to my satisfaction, which is hardly likely."

"The charge is one of murder, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Who did he kill?"

"Well, up to now it hasn't come out for the sake of the family. But if Pyne is here you will know soon enough."

"It's a funny way to go to work."

"Commissioner's orders, my boy. I am not to reveal the la—the name until it cannot be helped. However, as I have said so much I don't mind telling you it's a woman, and a big one too."

"Big! Fat, do you mean?"

"No. A woman of high position."

"Phew. A regular society scandal, I suppose."

"That's about the size of it."

On arrival at Sloane-square they quickly ascended to No. 12 Raleigh Mansions.

A stout, elderly woman answered their knock, and a glance at her face revealed the map of Ireland, although her name was Saxon Robinson.

"Mr. Pyne in?" said Winter.

"Faith, he's not."

"Then where is he?"

"I don't know, mister; an' if I did I wouldn't be afther telling when axed in an oncivil manner."

"All right, Mrs. ——"

"Robinson's my name, if that's any use to ye."

"Very well, Mrs. Robinson. We want to have a word with Mr. Pyne, and we will be much obliged to you if you can tell us when he is likely to return, if he is in London."

"Arrah, it's meself is mixed entirely about him. But *this* Mr. Pyne is in London right enough, and is comin' in to dinner in half-an-hour, so by yer leave I'll just go on wid me wurruk."

"May we come in and wait for him? We wish particularly to see him."

Mrs. Robinson surveyed them suspiciously, but seemingly decided in their favour.

"Stip in her, gintlemen both," she said, and conducted them to the sitting-room.

A fire now burned brightly in the grate, where Brett had made his pregnant discovery. The damaged bracket still stared at Winter, so to speak, but he saw it not.

Mrs. Robinson bustled about in the kitchen, and the two officers sat silent, waiting developments. Suddenly a thought occurred to Winter, and he went into the passage.

"Mrs. Robinson," he said, "what did you mean by referring to *this* Mr. Pyne?"

A quick step came bounding up the stairs, and a key rattled in the lock.

"You'd better ax him yerself," responded the housekeeper pithily, and the door opened to admit a handsome, well-knit man, tall and straight, with the clearly cut features of the true Westerner, and the easy carriage of one accustomed to the freedom of the prairie.

He was quietly dressed. The only sign that he was not a Londoner was given by his wide-awake felt hat, the last token of environment relinquished by a wandering citizen from the region of the Rockies. In the semi-darkness of the interior he could but dimly discern the form of the detective, standing behind the ready-tongued housekeeper.

"There's two gintlemen to see ye, Misther Pyne," said she.

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"Well, now, that's cu-rious," he answered, cheerfully. "I can only see one of you, but I'm glad to have you call, stranger, anyway; come right in. Are you sent by my friend to kinder cheer me up. I find this big city of yours a powerful sort of tonic after Wyoming. Come right in."

Mr. Winter was as greatly nonplussed by the new-comer's attitude as by his flow of language, carried on as it was in the balanced cadence of the American accent.

Within the drawing-room Pyne caught sight of the second detective. "Hallo! Here's the other one. Ve-ry glad to meet you both. Now, if you'll just tell me your names we'll get along straight away, as I guess you know mine all right."

The man was genuinely pleased at this unexpected visit. He smilingly pushed a box of cigars, green ones, towards them and helped himself to a weed.

"My name," said the detective, "is Inspector Winter, of Scotland Yard, and my friend here accompanies me officially."

"And hasn't he got a name?"

"Yes, but it doesn't matter."

"Well, if it doesn't matter, we won't quarrel. I guess you've got a message of some sort for me, else you wouldn't trouble to climb these stairs. Why don't you have e-le-vators in these big buildings?"

"As I said," began Mr. Winter, "we are from Scotland Yard."

"That's so. I've got that fixed O. K. Your name is I. Winter, from Scotland Yard. I don't know where Scotland Yard is, but we'll worry along without the geography of it."

"I am in the police. My title is Inspector. It is not my Christian name. Scotland Yard is the headquarters of the London police."

The American's eyes opened wide in wonder at this announcement, and a thought seemed suddenly to occur to him. But he said quietly:

"I'll figure it out better when you tell me why you've been good enough to call. And suppose we all sit down. I'm not used to stone pavements. I'm tired."

"Your name is Sydney H. Pyne?" said the detective severely, though he took a chair.

"So my people always told me."

"And you have occupied these chambers since August last?"

"Have I?"

"So I am informed."

"Get along with your story."

"You have just returned to England from Wyoming. The New York police cabled me that you arrived in Liverpool yesterday."

"Did they now? That was real cute of 'em."

"I want to ask you in the first instance, the exact date of your departure from this country?"

Before replying to the detective Pyne looked at him fixedly, as though he was trying to read what was passing in his mind.

At last he said, with a smile:

"Say, what are you after, Mr. Winter of Scotland Yard? What's the game? Who's been fooling you?"

"That is not the way to talk to me, sir. Answer my question fully and properly, or it may be worse for you."

"Jehosh. Have you come in to wipe the floor with me?"

"Are you going to reply to me or not?"

"I'm not going to speak square to any man who comes along and puts a thing like you do."

"Very well. I can get my information by other means. You leave me no alternative——"

Mr. Winter had half-risen and was about to add, "but to arest you," when with a rapidity known only to those accustomed to "draw" from boyhood, Pyne whipped a revolver from a hip pocket and covered the bridge of Winter's nose with the muzzle.

"Just you sit still, right there, Mr. Winter of Scotland Yard, or I will let daylight through you and your nameless

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friend if he interferes. You'd better believe me. By gad, I won't speak twice."

Neither Winter nor his companion were cowards. But they were quite helpless. They had not grapp'ed with the circumstances with sufficient alertness, and they were utterly at this man's mercy. They were away from the door, and a table separated them from Pyne, whilst there was that in his eye which told them that he would shoot them dead if either of them moved. They had both sprung to their feet, and now glared at him impotently.

"Now, gentlemen," said Pyne, with the utmost coolness, "let me persuade you to sit down again and go on with your story, which interests me."

Winter was scarlet with indignation and annoyance.

"Let me tell you——," he roared.

"Sit down!"

"Make the best of it, Jim," murmured the other policeman; and the queer gathering resumed their seats.

"That's better," said Pyne, genially. "Now, we'll have a nice little chat. Am I correct in supposing that you were about to march me off to gaol, just now, when I spoilt the plant?"

"There's no use in resisting," growled Winter. "You cannot escape. If you have an atom of sense left you will come with us quietly, as it's all up with you."

"It looks like it," said Pyne, with a grim smile. "But if it's so bad a case as all that there's no desperate hurry, is there?"

"You're only making matters more difficult for yourself."

"Maybe. But as I happen to be a citizen of the United States I allow that I can't be whipped off to prison just because a silly fool like you thinks it's good for me. I've been a law-abiding man all my life, and I've lived in places where each man made his own law. If you can show good cause for your action I'll stand the racket. But at present I regard you as a blamed idiot."

The situation overcame the detective. He could only mutter:

"Time will show who's the idiot."

"I'm getting mighty hungry, Mr. Winter of Scotland Yard, and I've a kind of notion that the old lady is ready with the eatables. Will you be good enough to say what you're after?"

"I came here to ask you to account for your movements, and, failing a satisfactory explanation, to arrest you."

"On what charge?"

"For being concerned in the murder of Lady Delia Lyle, on or about November 6th last."

"Lady Delia Lyle!"

"Yes."

"Arrest *me!*"

"Yes."

"I placed you right away. You *are* a blamed idiot, Mr. Winter of Scotland Yard."

This repetition of his address goaded the detective almost beyond endurance.

"Now you know the charge," he shouted, "are you coming with us quietly, or——"

"Or what?"

The revolver still hovered across the table.

"Are we going to sit here all night?"

It was a weak conclusion, but to suggest an attack was sheer madness under the conditions.

"I guess not," was the calm answer. "I want my dinner, and I mean to have it."

"Very well. Eat your dinner, and have done with it."

"That's better. You and your friend shall join me. We'll have a nice little talk, and straighten out matters, which have got kinder mixed."

This was too much for Winter's associate. He burst out laughing.

"I allowed there was a joke in the deal, somewhere," went on Pyne; "but I haven't quite got the hang of it yet. Now, Mr. Winter of Scotland Yard, are you going to act like a reasonable man, or must I keep your nose in a line with my shooting-iron?"

Winter was saved from deciding which horn of the dilemma he would land on, for a sharp rat-tat at the door induced silence, and a moment later Brett's voice was heard inquiring: "Is Mr. Pyne in?"

"Faix, there may be half-a-dozen of him in by this time," cried Mrs. Robinson. "I dunno where I am, at all, at all. The gintlemen are in the parlour, sir."

And Brett entered.

In order to scientifically enfilade the newcomer, Pyne backed to the corner. Reggie glanced at the three, saw the revolver, and said with a comical air of relief:

"Thank goodness, nothing has happened. Put away your revolver, Mr. Pyne; you will not need it."

Although the barrister's manner differed considerably from the brusque methods adopted by Mr. Winter, the American remained on his guard. He said stiffly:

"You all seem to know me fairish well; but if you had the advantage of closer acquaintance, you would allow that I am not the man to be rushed on a confidence trick. If somebody doesn't explain quick I will lose my temper, and there will be trouble."

"I sympathise with you!" cried Brett. "But the first thing you must learn in this country is to keep dry cigars for your visitors. Our respective tastes differ in that respect."

"I guess I'll cotton on to you, stranger; but I'm tired holding this pistol."

"Put it away, then. I tell you it is not wanted. Winter, listen to me. You have hit upon the wrong man."

"Wrong man!" cried the detective, feeling more confident in the barrister's presence. "Why, I've had a cable about him from New York."

"Possibly; but you're mistaken, nevertheless. Mr. Pyne has not been within five thousand miles of England for years, possibly not in his life."

"Bully for you, stranger," broke in Pyne.

"Then who is the Mr. Sydney H. Pyne whom you believe, as well as I, to be the murderer of Lady Delia Lyle?"

"Steady, Winter. The last time I saw you I appealed to you to go slow. The man whom you want, simply because he happens to be the real occupant of these rooms, is at present travelling to London as fast as he can from Florence, and his sister, Mrs. Hillmer, is with him."

"Florence! Mrs. Hillmer!" gasped the policeman. "I've just arranged to have her watched there."

"Your arrangements, though admirable, are somewhat late in the day."

"Then what is her brother's name?"

"Herbert Mensmore. For some reason, hidden at this moment, he lived here under the name of the gentleman who has, I see, been giving you a practical lesson in the art of not jumping at conclusions."

"Have you known this long?"

"For some weeks."

"Then why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I have no definite reason for connecting Mensmore with Lady Delia's death. If I had, his action in returning to London the moment he hears of the charge would shake my belief."

"Who told him?"

"Mrs. Hillmer."

"Oh, this business is quite beyond me. I can't fathom it a little bit."

And Winter sank dejectedly to his chair again.

(To be continued.)

The Author of this story is writing "The Great Strike" in *Pearson's Weekly.*

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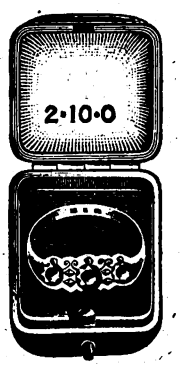

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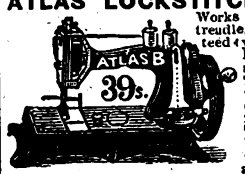

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

IN future, dear readers, I am going to have a weekly chat with you. I have arrived at this resolve for various reasons. In the first place, it is an article of editorial faith with me that a feature of this kind tends to strengthen the bonds of friendship between readers and editor, and in the second, I have been much besought of late to establish such a page by readers themselves. "Such-and-such a paper has it, why not you?" they say in effect. And so for once departing from the programme of *Short Stories*, which is to lead and not to follow, I comply, with the greatest pleasure in the world, with the wishes of my many correspondents.

WHAT are we going to chat about? Well, that depends to a great extent upon yourselves, for I shall look to you to assist me in this matter. I shall be happy to chat about whatever you please. Just what kind of subject that you might discuss with an old friend is what I mean. Perhaps you are anxious about some little point of everyday social conduct; maybe you are worried because the girl of your heart will flirt with "Charlie," or perhaps, reversing the case of sex, "Tom," or "Dick," or "Fred" may be unduly lethargic in the matter of "stating his intentions." In any such case, without intending to pose as an expert in etiquette, or setting up business as an amateur matrimonial agent, I still may be able to help you with a little commonsense advice and sympathy. So write to me.

IDEAL MAN AND WOMAN COMPETITIONS.

A LITTLE while ago I offered a prize of two guineas for the best idea (by a lady) of an ideal man, and a similar prize for the best idea (by a man) of an ideal woman. The result has astounded me. Postcards have come in by the thousand from every part of the kingdom, and from all sorts of men and women. The task of selection and adjudication has been extremely difficult. My hair has grown visibly greyer during the process, and upon my breast is a feeling of dull despair, for I, personally, can never hope to attain the standard of excellence which is expected in a man by many of my lady readers.

"The flame-clear light of inviolable truth must shine from out his azure eyes. Chesnut curls must wave above his towering brow where the majesty of intellect sits." So runs one description of an ideal man. It almost makes one despair—or buy a hair restorer.

Many ladies have selected some popular hero as their ideal. Thus Earl Roberts, Lord Kitchener and Major General Baden-Powell, come in for much approbation.

* * * * *

PLEASING too, in these days of problem plays and cheap cynicism, is the fact that many ladies describe their husbands and sweethearts as their ideals, and I am proud to say that many of my own sex, not to be outdone in this respect, claim pre-eminence for the particular objects of their hearts.

Quite a prominent feature is the unanimity with which competitors of both sexes seem willing to forego mere physical charms for the more enduring qualities of the heart. Which, after all, is exceedingly comforting to some of us.

PRIZES of two guineas each have been awarded to Miss E. Douglas, 34 Holt Street, West Hartlepool, and Mr. L. F. Andrewes, Norella, Stenlvee, Blackheath, S.E., for the following:

MY IDEAL MAN.

THE qualities I would most desire in an ideal man would be chivalry and courage. Smart young people nowadays fancy chivalry a relic of the days when our grandmothers sat at home spinning, and cycles were unknown. Not at all. My ideal man is chivalrous to a fault. In the street he will give place to the weak; amongst his companions he will never indulge in cheap sneers and scoffs at the expense of women. It is always a safe index to a man's character—his estimate of women. But it is in his own home that you will find my ideal man at his best. He will be loving, kind and respectful to his mother, and helpful to his brother and sister. In short, he will be a gentleman. He will also possess courage—courage to tell the truth at all costs, courage to be honest, courage to say "No" and withstand temptation. And if he has courage to do these things he will not turn coward when physical danger, even to life itself, comes. Then his character will show itself, and men will call him by his true name—A Hero.

MY IDEAL WOMAN.

MY ideal woman must be very human. She must not be an angel—at any rate, not at present. She must possess the truest beauty, and that which is the most difficult of attainment, the beauty of intelligence. Beauty of face or form is incidental, not necessary to her ideality. But the two most important characteristics of my ideal woman are, sympathy and the power to love deeply. This latter, indeed, comprises all that is most desirable. "Love covereth a multitude of sins." For a woman, who, while aiming at a high standard herself, yet recognises, nay, even sympathises with, the peccability of others, is a possession to be "valued above rubies." And if any misanthropic scoffer should doubt her existence he is to be pitied for his ignorance. For I have seen her.

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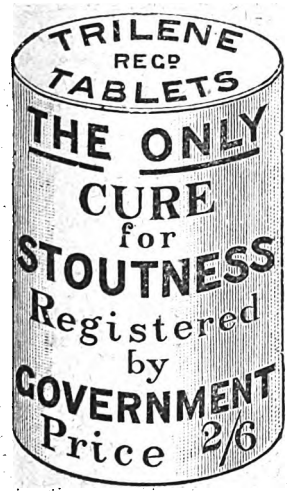

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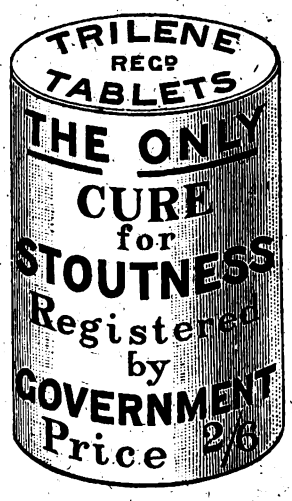

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely. You have our united thanks, and if I can do anything to promote your interests I will freely use my utmost endeavours to do so.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

Mrs. DARNLEY SMITH, Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, writes: "Trilene Tablets have reduced my weight very much. I am so much lighter in every way, and better in health."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

Miss CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st. and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

"77 Hindhill Street, Heywood, February 5th, 1898.

"Gentlemen,—I have not quite finished the box of Tablets and am 2lib. lighter. The change is great, and several friends are beginning the treatment, which not only reduces fat but strengthens rheumatic joints—such has been the case with me. "Yours sincerely, M. A. HEYWOOD."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholme Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

Mrs. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44, Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

A. M. PRATT of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mr. WALKER, 236 London Road, Hazelgrove, Stockport, says: "I have used one box and am 14lb. lighter. Send another soon as possible."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs, says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs E. ALEXANDER, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They have reduced me quite 2 stone, and I am now quite cured."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 40 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Mrs. TAYLOR-ROBINSON, of Tweed Green House, Whalley Range, Manchester, says: "I feel so much lighter and better since taking your Tablets, and am so much thinner that I hardly recognise myself."

Miss A. LONG, of 9 South Parade, Waterford, writes: "Your Tablets have reduced me 14lb."

Miss A. DAWSON, 62 Orchard Street, Weston-super-Mare, says: "Glad to say the Tablets have sufficiently reduced me. I shall always recommend them."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

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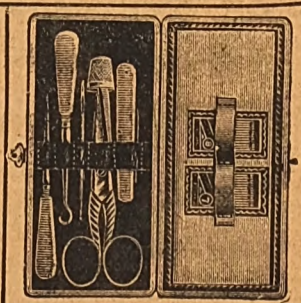

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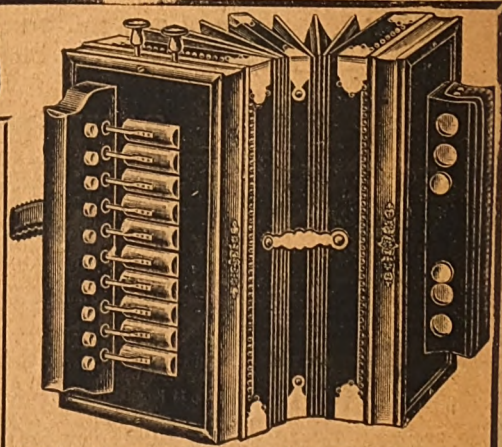

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LADY'S MAGAZINE, NO. 2 NOW READY. PRICE 6D.

SHORT STORIES

A WEEKLY MAGAZINE FOR HOME AND TRAIN

No. 634. FOR WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 23RD, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

STOP

THROWING MONEY AWAY ON DOUBTFUL REMEDIES,

AND DO NOT BE INDUCED to buy an article of which little or nothing is known.

STOP BEING MISLED. The Proprietor of **BEECHAM'S PILLS** does not publish testimonials, but he could fill a volume with those he has received if he so pleased. He is content to let **BEECHAM'S PILLS** stand on their own merits, knowing they recommend themselves; this they have done, are doing, and will continue to do.

REFRAIN FROM MAKING EXPERIMENTS with so-called remedies, but adhere to

BEECHAM'S PILLS

the bridge that has probably carried you over many an anxious time.

But if you have never tried **BEECHAM'S PILLS**, then ask your parents or friends what they think of them, and judge by what they say; you can generally trust your own acquaintances, though there are some folks it is very hard to believe, just as there are some advertisements published which are open to grave suspicion.

You can get 56 BEECHAM'S PILLS in a box labelled 1s. 1½d.

You can get 168 BEECHAM'S PILLS in a box labelled 2s. 9d.

No other advertiser of a recognized first-class medicine gives such good value, so **WHY THROW AWAY MONEY ON DOUBTFUL AND UNTRIED REMEDIES? BEECHAM'S PILLS** have been before the public for over FIFTY Years, and in spite of all opposition are to-day

MORE POPULAR THAN EVER, and why?

Because **THEY RECOMMEND THEMSELVES.**

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Height 12ins. Width 7ins.

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YOU send us **2/6** with your name and address, and we will send you one on approval.

IF you approve of it, you send us **3/-** on receipt, and **2/6** each month for five months, making the full **18/-**.

BUT OUR NET-CASH-WITH-ORDER PRICE IS **16/-** ONLY.

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containing illustrations of Watches, Clocks, Jewellery, &c., &c., at 20 per cent. below London prices will be sent to any address on receipt of postcard.

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And we will refund the cash sent if you do not approve of the parcel and you return it at once. (Signed) J. N. MASTERS.

Each Parcel contains 50 High-Class Table Articles.

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6	White Bone Table Knives	3/6
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2	,, Table Spoons	1/9
6	,, Dessert ,,	3/9
6	,, Tea Spoons	2/-
1 pair	,, Sugar Tongs	1/-
1 only	,, Sugar Sifter	1/6
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PLEASE NOTE! That we also supply other goods on similar terms.

SILVER, 2/-

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Every man suffering from Varicocele and the allied troubles, should send for treatise, describing their Causes, Symptoms, Results, and Successful and Painless Treatment without surgical operation or the use of cumbersome trusses and electrical appliances. Will be sent sealed, post free, three stamps.

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FREE. FREE.

Our £2 10s.

Real Silver Watch (with chain), or **A Real Gold Ring**

Set with REAL DIAMONDS and other stones.

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We give you your choice of either of these handsome presents for selling NINE articles of Jewellery at 1/6 each. (Regular price 2/6).

We do not want your money.

Just send us a stamped addressed envelope and say that you will either sell the jewellery or return it to us if you fail to sell it. On receiving your letter we will at once post you the jewellery.

When sold, send us the 13/6 you have received for same, and we will at once send you ABSOLUTELY FREE our £2 10s. Real Silver Watch with Chain, or the Gold Ring, whichever you desire.

You can sell our Jewellery in a few minutes at 1/6 each article. We have thousands of testimonials as to the quality and value both of our Jewellery and Presents.

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FOR HOME WORK.

"The machine that knitted the hosiery and comforts for the troops in Africa."—See what *The Times* said.

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 634.] For the Week Ending February 23rd, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

Fooled by a Woman.

THAT something very unusual had happened to the firm of Warde and Crowdey, the Regent Street jewellers, was very evident.

Mr. Warde, the senior member of the firm, was in the shop at the ridiculously late hour of nine o'clock in the evening, and Mr. Warde strode up and down the shop with ill-concealed nervous excitement. Every now and again he stepped to the door and glanced up the street as though expecting someone. That someone was no less an individual than Bart Hocking of Scotland Yard, and he came upon the scene a few minutes before ten o'clock.

"What's wrong now?" he said genially, as he was conducted to the private office in the rear of the shop.

"Everything's gone wrong," said the gentleman who had conducted the detective, "permit me, Mr. Hocking—this is Mr. Gray," with a wave of the hand to the other occupant of the office. "This is a nasty business—a nasty business!"

Mr. Warde, the senior member of the firm, was evidently labouring under considerable excitement he could not control, and he punctuated his remarks by putting his glasses on his nose and then removing them.

"We have been completely done, sir, fleeced—fleeced, Mr. Hocking, and by a woman.

"Mr. Gray is at the head of our diamond department. A shrewd man, too. But I am not surprised that he was taken in by that woman. Why, I was myself completely taken in, sir. I had taken notice of her entrance, and—and observed her somewhat and the purchases she was making. She was a stunner, and no mistake. Why, she was the handsomest woman, the best dressed, well bred, most—most—why, bless me, she would have deceived anyone. She looked like a queen."

Mr. Warde put his glasses on his nose to finish with, and then proceeded to duck his head and look over them at Bart Hocking.

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"Perhaps she is entitled to be called a queen," replied Bart quietly. "The Queen of Diamonds, eh? But come, tell me just how this thing happened."

"Why, this afternoon about two o'clock, a lady walked into the shop," responded the jeweller. "Gray, here," indicating the gentleman with a wave of the hand, "was behind the diamond counter.

"The lady walked straight up to him and presented her card. Show Mr. Hocking that card, Gray."

Gray produced the card, with something very like a groan. It read as follows:

DOCTOR WALTER FARDYCE.

MRS. FARDYCE.

Kensington Gardens, W.

The lady's name was engraved. The physician's name and address were written, apparently with a fine steel pen.

"As soon as she handed that card to me," explained Gray, "she drew it back again instantly as though she had made a mistake. It was very clever, I see now.

"'Oh, I beg your pardon!' she said, 'I didn't notice that that card had writing on it. Somebody's address it seems to be.'

"She adjusted a dainty pair of gold-bowed eyeglasses, and looked at the card.

"'Ah, it's only my husband's name,' she said. 'That does not matter, though I don't know how he happened to write it on my card.'

"She selected a fresh card and gave it to me, and after I had glanced at it, I asked her, as politely as possible"—here Gray ground his teeth—"what could I do for her?"

"'It's my birthday,' she said. 'Isn't it dreadful? They do come round so fast to us women when we are no longer young.'

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"She made a pretty little gesture of regret for old Father Time's ruthless conduct, and then continued:

"'My husband is going to do his best to prevent the day from being a sad one for me. He has promised me a handsome present of diamonds, and, better still, has given me permission to choose them myself. That's what I am here for.'

"I saw a pretty good sale in that, so I immediately began to show her some handsome stones. I happened to know all about Doctor Fardyce, though I'd never seen him nor any of his family. He's a very rich man, and spends money freely. I supposed that he'd lay out at least a thousand pounds on this particular present and might go as high as five thousand.

"But when I saw the lady picking up solitaires and bracelets and necklaces, and laying them aside as if she intended to take them all, I began to stare.

"She didn't ask the price of anything at first, and so, after awhile, I ventured to ask, in the most roundabout way, how much she intended to lay out on her birthday present.

"'Oh, I can have almost anything I want,' she said. 'Dr. Fardyce has sold one of his houses, and he said he'd give me all he got for it, and that I might put it into diamonds, which, he says, are a good investment. I'm quite an expert, you must know, as a buyer.'

"Well, I hadn't supposed so, by the reckless way in which she had chosen thousands upon thousands of pounds worth of stones; but when she began to talk figures I discovered that she'd told only the truth.

"She knew all about diamonds. I didn't get any the best of her. When we had finally listed the articles, and had made prices on paper (which she did very carefully, compelling me to write the figures), I was forced to confess to myself that she really was making a first-class investment.

"Acting under instructions from Mr. Warde, I was willing to sell cheap, and the jewels she got for £10,117 were very cheap. If she sells them again in six months as carefully as she bought, she could make a handsome profit."

"When Gray had made his prices," the jeweller said, taking up the story, "the woman said that she would like her husband to see the stones before closing the sale, and asked if we could send a man from the shop with her to her home. She said the doctor would be there between the hours of three and four, and that he would have accompanied her to make the purchase, but for pressure of business.

"Gray came and asked me about it.

"'Is the woman all right?' I asked.

"'I believe so,' he answered; 'I saw her husband's name on one of her cards. I know his signature. Have seen it often when I was with Tate, Cope and Co.'

"Well, that seemed to settle it. Though, to tell the truth I had no doubts about her and I'm sure Gray had not. I've been watching the sale all the time, and, well, I've told you what I thought of her. I even spoke with her a few minutes, myself, and there wasn't a suggestion of anything wrong in her language or manner. Her story about wanting her husband to see the diamonds first was perfectly plausible, and she even asked for a man to accompany her, for greater safety. I did what I thought was right and even asked her pardon for sending one of the clerks with her.

"She laughed at that, and said she wouldn't dare to take the responsibility of caring for them herself.

"Ackersley, one of our most trustworthy clerks, came over to ask me a question while we were discussing this point, and as he turned away, she said in a low tone.

"'Can't you send that young man with me, he's so polite.'

"Ackersley is a man that one would notice and like at the first glance. He is a fine-looking fellow and dresses like a west-end swell, always. I don't mean loud, but well.

"I didn't think the request at all strange. Our messenger was of course to accompany her and she naturally wanted as gentlemanly a fellow as possible."

At this point Gray tore at his moustache viciously.

"I don't know what was the matter with us," he said. "It seems as if we must have been blind. Certainly the game was open enough."

"Gray thinks that Ackersley was in it," said Warde.

"Why?" asked Bart.

"Because he hasn't come back," said Gray somewhat warmly.

"There are several reasonable explanations of that fact," rejoined the detective. "Before I discuss them, let me learn just what you have done."

"In the first place," replied Warde, "I must tell you that the woman and Ackersley rode away together in the carriage in which she had come."

"It was an open carriage. I stood at the door of the store when they started. There was Ackersley with the jewel case on his knee. There was the coachman in full livery sitting on the box as if he was driven into it, and there was the woman, handsome as a picture and wonderfully young-looking. By the way, Gray, how old should you think she was?"

"Forty-five, at least," growled Gray.

"Not a bit of it!" exclaimed Warde. "She didn't look much over thirty. I'm particular about this, for it may account for any influence she has exercised over Ackersley."

"Perhaps," said Gray, "but I guess the plunder is the main thing with him. He has been living beyond his means."

"Well, to return to the story," said Warde, "it had been agreed that Ackersley should come back with the diamonds, or Doctor Fardyce's cheque for them, as soon as possible.

"We thought he might not be able to make it by six o'clock—the hour when we close—so it was arranged that Gray should stay here a while and wait for him."

"So I did," said Gray, taking up the story. "I had dinner sent in, and I remained here after the shop was closed engaged in some work with a lot of new stones which I recently purchased for the firm.

"Time slipped away fast, and it was eight o'clock before I realised it. It was so quiet that I heard when Big Ben struck an hour, and at that very moment it flashed through me that Ackersley should have been back, and that something was wrong.

"I picked up a telephone book, and found that there was a 'phone in Doctor Fardyce's house. Then I could have kicked myself for not using it in the afternoon.

"I rang the call. The operator at the Exchange said that that instrument had been taken out of the house, but that Doctor Fardyce had one in his sanatorium in Surrey, though it wasn't in the book.

"Of course I asked her to give me the sanatorium. Doctor Fardyce was there. He came to the 'phone.

"I told him that Mrs. Fardyce had called at our shop in the afternoon; but he interrupted me right there, to say that Mrs. Fardyce was in Liverpool.

"Without letting him know that a robbery had

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actually been committed, I satisfied myself beyond a doubt that the woman was an impostor, and that, in short, we had been done.

"Then I telegraphed to Mr. Warde. He replied that he would come down to the shop.

"On the way down, however, he struck the idea of going to Fardyce's town house. He did so, and found it closed."

"They haven't lived there since the first part of the summer," said Mr. Warde. "I learned that from the neighbours."

"But here's the curious part of it. Beyond question, the woman and Ackersley drove to that house. The people living on the other side of the street told me so.

"The carriage stopped before the house. The coachman got down from the box and went in by the area door. Presently he came out, and seemed to deliver a message to the people in the carriage.

"Then he got on the seat again, and the carriage drove off. I wasn't able to trace it beyond that point, so I came on here, telegraphed to Scotland Yard for you, and here we are."

"It's a very pretty case,' said Bart. "I'm glad to get into it."

As he said these words there was a noise of hoofs and wheels, and a carriage stopped before the store.

Warde stepped to the door, unlocked it, and the next moment two women entered hurriedly, and in evident excitement.

THE MAN BY THE ROADSIDE.

"MRS. ACKERSLEY," exclaimed Warde, "what has brought you here?"

The person addressed was a sweet-faced lady somewhat past middle-age. She was accompanied by an extremely handsome girl. Both were very well-dressed, though not expensively, but as ladies of slender means and abundant good taste dress when they are going out to some evening entertainment.

"My son," cried Mrs. Ackersley; "I am anxious about him."

Warde was on the point of disclosing the whole matter with a directness which might have been sufficient to seriously endanger the life of a woman as delicate as Mrs. Ackersley seemed to be. A sign from Bart warned him.

"Why are you anxious about him?" asked Warde, restraining himself.

"He was to meet us at the theatre," said Mrs. Ackersley, "and he did not do so. He had said that he might be quite late, and had told us to remain through the performance.

"We did so, though at the last we became quite anxious about him. But when we got to my home and found that he had not been there, we were alarmed.

"Oh, has something happened to him? I seem to read it in your face that—that——"

"Miss Enid"—indicating the handsome girl—"remembered that Arthur has sometimes been detained here very late, and so she suggested driving down here. Oh, has something happened to him? I seem to read in your face that—that——"

She stopped, overcome by her feelings.

"To be frank with you," said Warde kindly, "we do not know where your son is, and we, also, are anxious about him."

Mrs. Ackersley gasped for breath, and would have fallen but for Bart's arm. Miss Enid, too, was prompt to render assistance, though it was evident that she could scarcely find the strength to do so.

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Bart had not lost a single detail of this scene. He had noticed, besides what has been related, an interchange of glances, rapid as thought, between Miss Enid and Gray.

They were distrust and suspicion on the one side, and a suggestion of malicious triumph on the other, which were full of meaning to the keen detective.

"Am I right in supposing," he said to Mrs. Ackersley, "that Miss Enid and your son are on terms of very close friendship?"

"They are to be married," replied the lady.

Gray scowled.

"So I ventured to imagine," said Bart; but whether he referred to the engagement or to Gray's frown may be a matter of conjecture.

He did not pursue the subject, but, anticipating the questions that were on the lady's lips, he told the story of the diamond robbery so far as it is known to the reader.

This he did in the gentlest manner, but it was an ugly story at the best.

There seemed to be only two alternatives. Either Ackersley was in the plot, or he had suffered some injury at the hands of the plotters.

It was impossible to account for his failure to return or to communicate with the girl in any other way. True he might be a prisoner, but such was improbable to say the least.

"It looks bad for your son, there is no denying," said Gray to Mrs. Ackersley. "He was implicitly trusted by Mr. Warde. But we all hope even now that he will prove to be honest."

"You need have no anxiety on that score," said Miss Enid. "He will."

"That's how the wind blows, is it?" was Bart's mental comment, as he took in every expression and gesture of those about him. "Gray is in love with the young lady, and jealous of his rival and nothing will suit his purpose better than to have Ackersley found guilty."

"Allow me to remark that I quite agree with you, Miss Enid," he said aloud.

Mr. Warde and the two ladies looked very much relieved, and the former took occasion to remark:

"This is Mr. Bart Hocking of Scotland Yard. You have heard of him?"

The mother at once appealed to the detective.

"Tell me," she said, "do you think my son is safe, or that he has suffered at the hands of some dreadful criminals?"

"From all I can learn there is but one criminal in this case, so far, and that is this woman. Who her accomplices are and how they have worked I have yet to find out. Your son was young and strong, and was doubtless able to take care of himself. It is certain, however, that he has met with some difficulty in the discharge of his duty, and it remains for us to help him out of it.

"The greatest help you can render me at present, ladies, is to go home and remain there until we communicate with you. Should Mr. Ackersley return home, telegraph at once to Scotland Yard."

The ladies reluctantly yielded to Bart's persuasion, and at once bade good-night and were driven home.

As the door was closed behind them Bart Hocking turned to Gray and said:

"I wish you would remain here constantly, Mr. Gray. Should Ackersley turn up, communicate with headquarters. Mr. Warde, will you accompany me?"

The famous detective and the jeweller went out together, and, hailing a cab, Bart Hocking gave directions to be driven to the house in Kensington Gardens.

"We must trace that carriage from this point," said Bart, when they had arrived.

"Impossible," exclaimed his companion.

Bart smiled.

"Nothing is impossible," he said.

Some think that this tracing of a person or a vehicle is simply a matter of asking questions. They are mistaken. It requires skill and an intelligent perception, of which an untrained mind has no conception. With the born detective, there is to be sure a great deal of instinct—a sort of second sight.

Although it was far past midnight when they set out, Bart was able to follow that carriage along the route it took through the city streets. It took a great deal of patient work, the asking of innumerable questions, and much profound reasoning.

At last Bart and his companion made their way to the nearest hackney stand, and the detective looked carefully at the horses, eventually selecting one, that showed he was an excellent judge of horse flesh and knew when the qualities of speed and endurance are apparent.

A few words of direction to cabby, and they were off as fast as they coul l safely go.

"Where are you going?" asked Warde, in a tone of bewilderment.

"We are going to visit the sanatorium of Dr. Fardyce, in Surrey. I want to ask the gentleman a few questions."

"But, my dear sir, he can't possibly know anything about it."

"Possibly not."

"You don't suspect him?" asked Mr. Warde in consternation.

"No, I can't say I do. I'm not doing any suspecting yet. But I am not going to his asylum as a patient. No; my brain is working all right, I think, and I am quite sure Dr. Fardyce can have no conscious connection with this affair."

"Then why are you going there? By Jove, I have an idea! I wonder it didn't occur to me before."

"What is your idea?"

"Why, Fardyce keeps a lunatic asylum."

"That's the size of it, although he talks, or rather writes—for I've read some of his stuff—about diseases of the brain as though you could wash them out of the head with a shampoo."

"His patients are crazy. Now you've got my idea. This thing was done by a patient who imagined she was the doctor's wife."

The detective laughed heartily.

"You are ingenious at conjecture, but it won't work."

Mr. Warde looked hurt.

"I'm simply following the trail of that carriage."

"Why, how do you know——"

"Look here! This woman said she was going to see her husband. She drove up to the town house. Of course, she knew that it was closed.

"That was only a starter. She couldn't turn any trick with a man like Ackersley in broad day and in the city streets.

"In short, she had to take him somewhere else. Where? Why, of course, to Doctor Fardyce's other residence—to his sanatorium or lunatic asylum or whatever you call it.

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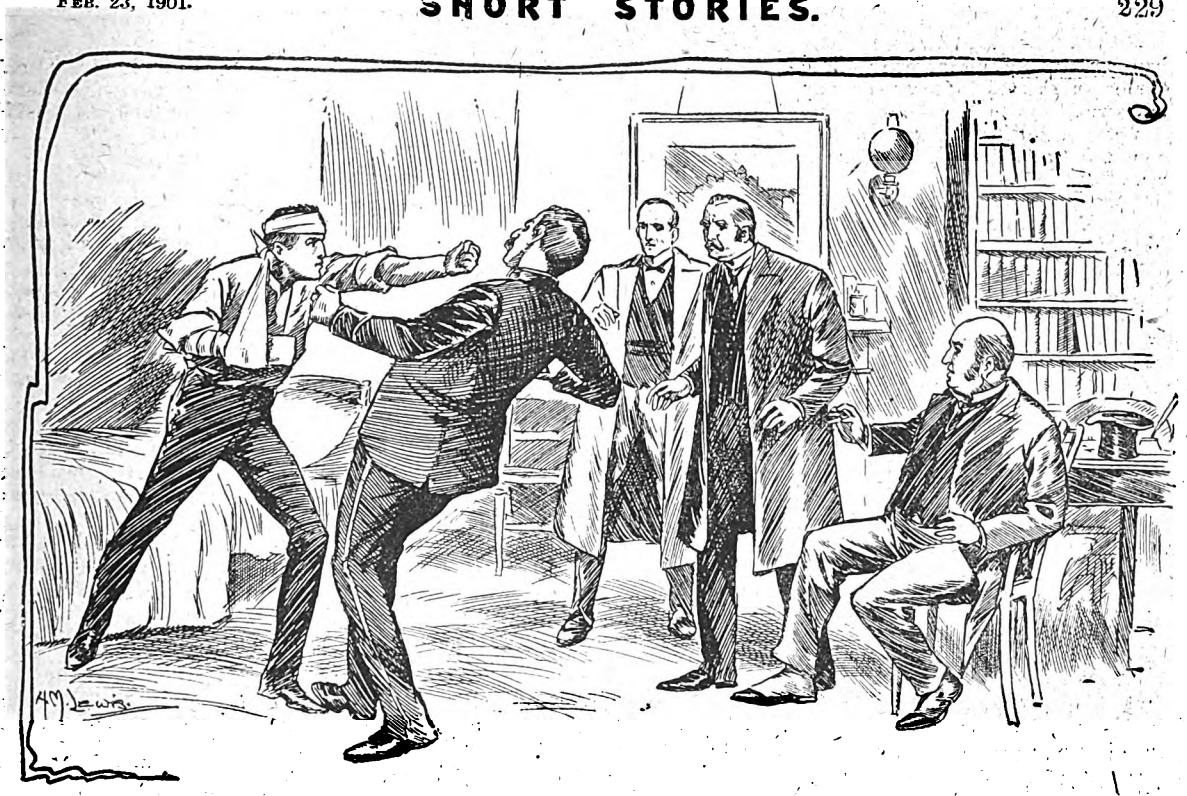

"He staggered to his feet and struck straight out."

"That's in quite an open country. It would give some chance for the job to be done.

"And it would have seemed quite natural to Ackersley that they should go there. Of course, that coachman who pretended to go into the house delivered a satisfactory message explaining why the doctor wished his wife to bring the diamonds to the sanatorium.

"To make this conclusion perfectly sure, I traced the carriage for some distance in this direction. I have no doubt now as to its destination."

"But what do you think became of Ackersley?"

Bart's brow darkened.

"I'm afraid he's been roughly dealt with, but Nan Oldham has always had the reputation of avoiding violence."

"Nan Oldham? Who is she?"

"The woman in the case. I recognised her at once by the description. She's one of the finest confidence operators in the world. She ought to be, for she's been at it since she was ten years old, and she's now forty-nine, or will be on the twenty-ninth of this month."

"Is it possible? By Jupiter! What a head you must have! Why, you recognise this thief in a flash; you knew what she was doing before you were born, and you name her birthday as if she were a member of your own family."

"I'm quite at home in the great and ancient family of Crook," laughed Bart; "it's an interesting family, and repays study."

They flew along over the excellent roads. Day broke, but mistily, so that it was not yet light when they entered the ground surrounding the sanatorium.

A large and dense grove completely hid the house The private way wound through the shadows of the great trees, as if seeking the darkest spots.

His eyes seemed to pierce the shadows.

Suddenly "Halt!" he cried, and sprang out. The light of his lantern flashed upon the way. He seemed to be taking measurements.

"The carriage passed here," he said. "It went in, and it returned. Of course, I can't be sure of this; but I obtained one fairly good imprint of the wheels while we were tracing. The carriage was unusually wide. Drive on; I will walk a few steps. Hold."

The last word was uttered softly, but with a thrill that struck to Warde's heart.

Bart's figure, too, might have been a sculptured ideal of Attention.

Suddenly he leaped over some low shrubbery, and vanished instantly from Warde's view.

That was too much for Warde. His curiosity, reinforced by a nervous dread of some terrible disclosure, got quite the better of him.

He leaped out and sprang forward toward the spot where Bart had stood, the horse frightened by the sudden movement, dashed ahead, and went careering up the avenue with a clatter of hoofs, and a rattle of the swaying vehicle.

"What's that?" called Bart.

"Cabby has lost control of his horse."

"Let them go. Come here."

A light shone among the trees. It was close by the road, but a dense shadow had hitherto hidden Bart. The lantern's light had been thrown upon the ground, but

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when Bart turned, at the noise of the runaway cab, the light became visible and guided Warde.

He, too, leaped over the little hedge-row, and found Bart standing beside a dark object which lay huddled upon the ground, upon the gnarled roots of a great tree.

UNRAVELLING THE MYSTERY.

"Is this Ackersley?" said Bart.

He had turned the man upon his back. The light of the lantern flashed upon his face.

Warde shuddered.

"I don't know," he said. "I shouldn't recognise him. He's dead of course."

"No, he isn't dead, and he isn't going to die."

"What? With that face!"

"That's only a bruise. It looks rather gruesome, I admit, but in a week's time, he will look as well as ever."

"I shouldn't know him," said Warde, "Yet, it looks like him. Yes, it must be he. But, hold on! These aren't his clothes."

"Sure?"

"Perfectly. There's nothing fashionable about this rig."

"I should say not," responded the detective. "The same idea crossed my mind."

"What ails him?"

"He's got a bad cut on the inside of his right arm, and he has fainted from loss of blood. Why he didn't bleed to death is a question which I leave to his guardian angel. However, he is safe now, I have stopped the bleeding. We must take him to the house."

Steps were heard on the walk. Men were running. The light of a lantern flashed among the trees.

A burly man leaped over the low hedge and confronted them, holding up the lantern so that the light struck into their faces.

"What are you doing here?" he cried.

"We were coming out to see Dr. Fardyce," replied Bart, "and we found this wounded man in the grounds."

The fellow with the lantern bent forward. Then he shouted to someone in the road.

"It's him! Here he is!"

"Who?" asked Bart blandly.

"An insane patient from the sanatorium," responded the man. "He escaped during the night. Is he dead?"

"No, he will come to himself soon. What's his name?"

"Al Hayman. I don't know any more about him. Dr. Fardyce can answer your questions if he thinks best."

At this moment cabby drove up slowly, having regained control of his horse. The wounded person was carried out and put into the cab.

The newly-risen sun by this time was dispersing the mists and paling the lantern's light

They drove to the house. On the veranda of the large and handsome building they saw Dr. Fardyce, a tall, high-shouldered man, with a tremendous mass of hair that was almost white, though he seemed not to be very old.

"You've got him, have you?" he asked. "Who are these men?"

Bart was not slow in effecting an introduction, though he did not allow it to delay proceedings. It is Bart's peculiar faculty that he always directs when he wishes to do so. He asked the doctor who the wounded man was.

"He's a patient committed in the usual way to my care."

"By whom?"

"By his mother, under the advice and certification of physicians, as the law directs. Here are the papers."

"Doctor Fields, Doctor Lee, Doctor Warren Graham," murmured Bart, glancing at the document. "I know the first two, but not the last."

"He is, I understand, a very competent physician. He was here yesterday when this young man was committed."

"Spare man, not above medium size, close-trimmed beard and moustache, very bright blue-grey eyes?" asked Bart.

"Yes."

"I know him. Please tell the whole story."

"Well," replied Doctor Fardyce, "it was the day before yesterday when the young man's mother came here. She described her son's case to me.

"It seems that he suffered from melancholia, accompanied by the usual delusions and other adverse symptoms. He had, for instance, the delusion of persecution—very common, as you know. When irritated, so she told me, he imagined that he was being robbed, etc., etc. Common enough.

"Well, she examined my establishment with the utmost care. She inspected the kitchens, the bedrooms, the sanitary arrangements—everything.

"I have never seen a more intelligent woman, nor one of more refined and cultivated manner and conversation.

"At last she expressed herself satisfied. She promised to bring her son the next day.

"She arrived promptly, accompanied by the son—whom you see here—and by Doctor Graham.

"The young man seemed perfectly calm, but his mother was evidently labouring under violent agitation. When she came into the parlour I was not present. In fact, on seeing her approach, I had gone to summon two of my assistants, for I feared a scene. She had prepared me for it.

"The two assistants, one of whom is now present," he pointed to a broad-shouldered fellow, who was attempting to revive the patient, "came into the room before me.

"The lady, the son, and Doctor Graham were there. Suddenly the lady's feelings overcame her.

"She flung her arms around the young man's neck and began to bid him the most affectionate adieu.

"Of course, that was very injudicious. He became violent so my assistants tell me, in a moment.

"The mother attempted to get out of the room. The son raved, and declared that he was being robbed.

"You see, that was his delusion. His mother had prepared us for that.

"Finally he sprang towards his mother, who had attempted to leave the room, and my assistants were obliged to seize him.

"They pinioned his hands. His mother, with tears in her eyes, kissed him while my men held him, and then tore herself away, followed by Doctor Graham.

"And accompanied by ten thousand one hundred and seventeen pounds worth of diamonds belonging to you, Mr. Warde," said Bart, "I guess the game is clear enough now."

"What?" gasped Warde and the doctor in one breath.

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"Certainly," said Bart. "The woman was Nan Oldham, the celebrated confidence operator; the 'doctor' was her husband; the coachman on the box was in reality her son; and the pretended son was your clerk, Ackersley who now lies here bruised and unconscious."

The two men were speechless. Bart continued:

"I can see how it was done. That husband of hers is really a doctor, but he's much more of an actor. It must have been he who played the lunatic, and was examined by Dr. Fields and Dr. Lee.

"Then, you see, when the certificate was made out, the husband, Oldham, had the two doctors' signatures. He merely put on Dr. Graham's name in order that he might pass for a doctor out here."

"But the diamonds——" Warde began.

"They will be recovered; I have notified the police. Oldham and his wife will be arrested."

It may be well to say that this was actually the case.

He found Bart standing beside a dark object.

When Bart had spoken, a noise was heard in that corner of the room where Ackersley lay on a couch.

"He's coming to," said the attendant.

Neither before nor since is there a case of such a remarkable recovery in all Bart's experience.

Ackersley woke from his stupor almost as a man wakes in the morning. He gazed wonderingly round. Then the condition of things was explained to him.

Then Ackersley told how the woman had taken him to the city house, how the coachman had brought out the pretended message that Dr. Fardyce had been unexpectedly called to the asylum, how the woman had persuaded him to go there.

Then came the scene in the parlour, his surprise when the woman suddenly flung her arms around his neck and began to call him "her dear son," his wrath when, overpowered by the two strong men, he saw her take the box of jewels from the table, where he had put it, and walk off with it.

In the struggle which he had made to free himself, his clothes were torn to shreds, and both the attendants received mementoes of his skill as a boxer.

But he was finally caged in a room with barred windows, where he yelled and raved until he was worn out.

In the night he had escaped by wrenching the bars off the window and breaking the sash.

As he climbed through, he cut himself with a piece of the window glass, but he did not think it was serious. The flow of blood, however, soon weakened him, and he fell unconscious beside the road, toppling over the low hedge and string face downward upon the roots of the tree. He remembered no more.

It is needless to say that the fortunate conclusion of the adventure carried joy to Mrs. Ackersley and Miss Enid—a joy which Mr. Gray could not share.

"There's one particularly curious thing about this case," said Bart in summing up after the arrest of the Oldhams and the recovery of the diamonds. "This woman's mother worked almost the same game in Liverpool nearly fifty years ago. Now, as the mother died when this girl was an infant, and it's doubtful whether the daughter ever heard of it, we find this problem—Did Nan Oldham inherit the game? Was it implanted in her brain? I think I'll send this to the Society for Psychical Research."

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A BARD OF THE "HALLS."

"You knows I ain't a 'ard woman, Mister Jessip; but pay me somethin' this week you must, or I'll 'ave to let your room to somebody else. Times is bad; here's my own flesh an' blood to think on an' the struggle it is for a pore widder like me to——"

"I think I shall be able to manage something this week, Mrs. Batty—perhaps to-day. I'm just off now to try my luck."

"There mustn't be no thinkin' about it. Onless you can settle up the back rent, you réal'y must make room for somebody as can pay reg'lar. 'Eaven knows, I wouldn't speak so crool if I wasn't obliged; but it's a dooty I owes to my children when they ain't gettin' none too much to eat. You see 'ow I'm placed?"

"Yes, yes; you've been very good to me, and nothing would please me better than to square up. Anyhow, wish me luck at the Corner to-day. I've written a song for Hyde—the famous Arnold Hyde, you know. I fancy he'll like it."

"I 'ope 'e will, an' that 'e'll pay you somethin' 'andsome."

"We shall see about that. Well, good-morning, Mrs. Batty; I'll be back as soon as I can."

And, opening the street-door—for the foregoing colloquy had taken place in the passage—Mrs. Batty's second-floor-back left the house.

"Pore feller!" mused the landlady, as she retired to her kitchen; "'twas a 'ard job to tell 'im 'e must go, 'e do look that mortal bad—but there, I 'ad to do it."

His eyes fixed on the pavement, Paul Jes op slowly made his way towards the eastern end of York Road, Lambeth. It was Monday morning; that morning of the week on which all sorts and conditions of folks connected with the "variety" profession assemble at the spot known as "Poverty Corner."

Ever since music-halls have existed, "the Corner" has been the Monday morning rendezvous of artistes, agents, managers, song-writers, and certain mysterious nondescripts who go there on Heaven knows what business. The "stars" usually drive up to the Corner, and swagger into the saloon of the adjacent tavern, where portly, overdressed agents and proprietors await them with contracts ready for signature. The failures of the profession cool their heels on the spacious pavement outside, discuss the prospects of something turning up, and try to borrow shillings from any fellow-pro. who was lucky enough to be "in work" during the previous week.

It was among the seedy ones of the pavement that Paul Jessop took his stand. Though the day was bitterly cold, he, like many others present, wore no overcoat. His clothes, originally of none too stout a texture, were nearly threadbare, his boots were decidedly leaky; and as his diet for several days past had consisted of dry bread and weak tea, it was small wonder that he looked somewhat pinched and haggard.

Paul Jessop was a poet—a bard of the halls. It was an unlucky night for him when his maiden effusion was graciously accepted by a third-rate comic vocalist appearing at the "Bijou," a minor north-London hall. At that time Jessop was managing a little grocery establishment for his aged mother, and, being on friendly terms with the proprietor of the neighbouring "Bijou," he was almost a nightly frequenter of the place. He hobnobbed with the performers, stood them whiskies, and sometimes "went behind." Then, being ambitious, he had ground out four verses of doggerel with a chorus commencing "We're the boys who Never Pass a Pub," which, with some diffidence, he submitted to Arnold Hyde, an obscure artiste who was glad enough to render three songs a night for as many pounds per week.

Hyde voted Paul Jessop's ditty "rippin'."

"I'll get Jimmy Brett to do the melody for it," he remarked with enthusiasm. "Set to a good tune, this thing o' yours 'll fairly knock 'em. It's great! You must do some more for me, my boy; there's coin to be made at the song-writin' biz—'eaps o' coin!"

The verses were duly set to a jingling melody, and Arnold Hyde sang the ditty. His prophecy proved correct—"We're the Boys who Never Pass a Pub" was to the public's taste; it delighted music-hall audiences, and was soon all over the town. 'Arrys and 'Arriets bawled the chorus as, with linked arms, they paraded the streets; every orgin-grinder added the tune to his *répertoire*; and the publishers of the song sold thousands of copies.

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Arnold Hyde's agent quickly pushed him to the front and at a bound the erstwhile third-rater became a "star," worked three big halls a night, and was driven thither in a brougham.

Paul Jessop, the writer of the "roof-raiser," received a guinea as his reward; Jimmy Brett, the composer, was paid thirty shillings (but then, he provided a set of "band-parts" in addition to the bare melody).

Hyde himself received several snug cheques from the music-publishers on account of the royalties; and as the ditty also made his reputation, he had reason to be tolerably satisfied with his bargain.

His initial success as a song-writer, proved the undoing of Paul Jessop. He began to neglect the grocery business, haunted the West-end and variety-palaces, and struck up expensive friendships in taverns of professional resort.

He wrote another song, which Hyde purchased "outright" for three guineas. This second attempt, entitled "I'll Never Take In Lodgers Any More," though not so successful as the first, was nevertheless popular. It strengthened Hyde's reputation, and brought him in money, for the song sold exceedingly well when published.

At his mother's death, which occurred about this time, Paul Jessop inherited the little grocery business. He engaged a man to attend to the shop; but, as things didn't flourish, Jessop sold the stock and goodwill for something less than a hundred pounds. Then he migrated to the south side of the Thames, and became a professional song-writer.

For a time his earnings averaged about a pound per week, for at the outset Arnold Hyde paid him the fixed sum of three guineas a song. As, however, Jessop failed to produce another "We're the Boys, etc.," the price was soon reduced by one half. Other artistes for whom he wrote paid anything from two guineas to five shillings.

Upon his earnings and the money realised by the sale of the business, Paul Jessop subsisted for a while. Then he contracted a serious illness, and, as the doctor's bill ran away with all but a few sovereigns of his scanty reserve fund, he deemed it prudent to seek cheaper lodgings.

Accordingly, he engaged a single room in a dingy street off the Waterloo Road, and at first paid the worthy Mrs. Batty's bill with commendable regularity. Soon, however, his money gave out, and arrears began to accumulate.

Jessop had never been a ready rhymester, but, since his illness, the composition even of such stuff as passed muster at the halls had become a species of torture. Nor would ideas come as formerly. Cudgel his brains as he would, his output dwindled both in quantity and quality, and during the last month he had disposed of one solitary song for the princely sum of seven-and-sixpence.

Thus things had gone from bad to worse, until at length Widow Batty, seeing no prospect of an improvement in the financial position of her second-floor-back, had been forced to "speak out" in the manner above related.

Paul Jessop had one ray of hope this morning. In his pocket was the MS. of a song written for his first patron, Arnold Hyde. The conception, writing, and touching-up of this effusion represented several days' hard labour, and the author was well satisfied with the result. It was a convivial ditty, written in Jessop's best style, and—what was a most important detail—it had a promising "catch-line."

"I'll ask four guineas for it," mused Jessop, as he shivered at the Corner, "perhaps Hyde will give that—it's a long time since he's had a real success."

Presently Hyde arrived in a smart trap, jumped out, and hurried into the saloon bar. Jessop waited about twenty minutes; then, judging that the comedian had probably settled what business he had with his agent, he entered the place.

Hyde was just standing brandies and ninepenny cigars to a knot of prosperous-looking cronies, when Jessop touched him upon the sleeve.

"Hullo!" he said, turning, "got something to show me?"

Jessop nodded, whereupon Hyde drained his glass, and led the way to a quiet corner of the bar.

"What's it like this time?" grumbled the comedian. "Those last things I had of you were rotten frosts—dear at a bob a time. I can't get hold of a decent song lately. Why don't you write me something as'll fetch 'em?"

Paul Jessop offered the MS. by way of reply.

"Um! this might go down," observed Hyde, after a hasty perusal. "How much?"

The poet nervously suggested four guineas, whereat the other laughed boisterously.

"Well, you've got a nerve, I don't think!" he remarked. "Why, I can get reams o' stuff like this at half-a-dollar a verse. Four guineas! I wonder you don't say five while you're about it!"

A quarter of an hour later, Paul Jessop was walking wearily to his lodgings. In his pocket was ten and sixpence. The great Arnold Hyde had promised him "a bit extra" in the event of the new song catching on.

* * * * *

Three weeks elapsed before "Oh Lor! Didn't We Shift the Gargle" was tried in public. The song was an instant, an unqualified success; "it fair paralysed em," to use Hyde's own expression. At each of the halls where he appeared the gallery seized lustily upon the chorus, and that "Oh Lor Didn't We Shift the Gargle" would be the song for some time to come was patent to everybody who understood the signs.

On the night that witnessed Hyde's great triumph there halted outside St. ——'s Hospital, a police-ambulance. From it was lifted an inanimate form. A moment's examination was sufficient. "A hopeless case! He won't live another hour," said the doctor.

* * * * *

Many Monday mornings came and went, and Arnold Hyde wondered why Jessop failed to show up at the corner. "I must give the poor devil a couple o' quid, I suppose," said the "star." "'Didn't We Shift the Gargle' is a fair ripper—it'll go for months yet."

The ditty did go for months. Hyde, whose popularity and salary had been steadily declining, once more became a prime favourite; his name appeared upon the bills in the largest of type, and his terms went up to a high figure. Royalties on the sale of "Oh Lor! Didn't We Shift the Gargle," also swelled his banking-account appreciably.

But he has never had an opportunity of rewarding the "poor devil" of an author. For Paul Jessop lived barely an hour after his admittance to St. ——'s Hospital, and, in due course, the coroner recorded a verdict of death from starvation and exposure.

The parish saw to the burial.

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THE LION'S WARS

The Afghan War of 1842. "The Army of Retribution."

ALTHOUGH it may be urged that having been guilty of the supreme folly of forcing on so proud and warlike a race as the Afghans a sovereign whom they hated, the reverses we subsequently experienced were a just punishment for the folly of our policy, still it was absolutely necessary on political grounds that the disaster which had befallen our arms in our ignominious retreat from Afghanistan in 1841 should be avenged.

Our humiliation had been great. Of the 21,000 fighting men, 30,000 camp followers, and 30,000 camels which had crossed the Indus to seat Shah Soojah on the throne a few thousands were left, but the whole of the Cabul division, which numbered 5,000, under General Elphinstone, had perished, with the exception of one man, whilst of the others General Sale was besieged at Jellalabad, and General Nott was surrounded at Candahar.

But there were other reasons besides the restoration of our prestige why a moment should not be lost in sending out an "Army of Retribution."

Lady Sale and her daughter, Lady Macnaghtan, and the wives of three officers, and three privates, were in the hands of the Afghans; in addition, General Shelton, Colonel Palmer, Major Pottinger, Major Griffith, twelve captains, nine lieutenants, three ensigns, three surgeons, and twenty-eight non-commissioned officers and privates. General Elphinstone had died in captivity.

Preparations for invading Afghanistan were pushed on with feverish haste. After much deliberation the command of the "Army of Retribution" was vested in General Pollock whose ability as an officer, in addition to a wonderful shrewdness of character, would be of great service in counteracting the egotistical timidity of Lord Ellenborough, the new Governor General, a clever but weak man.

In April, 1842, General Pollock and 8,000 men left Peshawar to relieve the "Illustrious garrison of Sale" as it was called, in India, and Nott at Candahar. A new line of advance was selected. No General had ever conveyed at that time a body of troops through the formidable Khyber Pass.

The news of our approach quickly spread amongst the fierce native mountain tribes, and on our arrival we found over 10,000 Khyberees ready to contend our advance. But the mountaineers had to contend, in the person of the British general, with one even more wily than themselves, and a body of British troops burning to avenge the late disastrous defeat. Finding the enemy posted in strong force on the precipitous cliffs lining the pass, General Pollock sent a couple of strong columns to scale the rugged heights and take the enemy on either side in the rear.

These admirable tactics so bewildered the Khyberees that our main body was enabled to traverse the pass and demolish the barrier which had been erected at the other end. This success, especially as our losses were only fourteen killed and 104 wounded, greatly elated the troops. But much remained to be accomplished.

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The country to be traversed was as full of defensive positions as that round Ladysmith in Natal. Indeed, the efforts of General Pollock to relieve General Sale of Jellalabad bore striking resemblance to the Natal operations of General Buller.

On April 6th Ali Musjid was attacked, and after a series of desperate encounters, lasting several days, the enemy were driven headlong from all their positions, and the road to Jellalabad was clear. Jellalabad relieved, and none too soon, Pollock was making arrangements for the relief of General Nott at Candahar when the vacillating Governor-General sent an order peremptorily forbidding Pollock to advance.

The Governor-General was greatly alarmed because he had heard that Brigadier England and a portion of General Nott's army had suffered a reverse at Hykulzye. Why General Nott was to be left to his fate because General England had been defeated is not clear.

Pollock obeyed his instructions, but he allowed General Sale to sally forth and attack Akbar Khan's camp. Such was the daring of the troops—a striking contrast to the column which perished under Elphinstone—that, on nearing the enemy, the artillery galloped to the front, their accurate discharges throwing the Afghan centre into such confusion, that two strong columns of our infantry coming up at the double were able to come to close quarters with the bayonet.

The Afghans fought in the most gallant style. The way their horsemen charged down on us would have done credit to our own cavalry, but as the British soldier is never so dangerous as after a reverse, the field was soon covered with riderless horses. There was no task too hazardous for our men to accomplish that day. Great damage was done during one of our flanking movements by an Afghan battery of three guns, screened by a garden wall, the serving of which was superintended by Akbar Khan in person. A wild rush, a British cheer, and in a trice the wall was scaled, and the gunners cut to pieces, Akbar Khan himself narrowly escaping capture.

It is said that the elation exhibited by our men when they learnt that these three guns they had taken were part of the artillery lost by the Cabul force under Elphinstone, was something to remember. Strong men flung themselves on these mute witnesses of their country's dishonour, kissing and hugging them as if they were alive.

Although the day was practically over, our men could not rest content till the recovered artillery had regained its lost character, so they at once turned on the foe. About 5 p.m., the Afghan camp caught fire, burning the whole of their tents. This completed their discomfiture. During the retreat, we captured all their food, munitions, standards, besides killing some thousands, including many of their most powerful chiefs. Our own loss was trifling, three officers and about fifty wounded, in addition to casualties among the native troops.

To have been soundly thrashed by the very force they had been blockading was a deep mortification to the Afghans. But the retirement of General England to Quetta, although quite an unimportant affair, still weighed so heavily on the spirits of the Governor-General that he ordered General Nott to evacuate Candahar, and retreat to the Indus, after demolishing the defences and blowing up the gateways. As Nott was not a general of the retiring order he, naturally, deeply resented his instructions, but fearful lest the command of his force should be transferred to one of the staff of the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Jasper Nicholls, who had disapproved of the expedition, he obeyed.

The moment it became known in India that Lord Ellenborough had resolved on the evacuation of the country a storm of indignation arose. This so unnerved India's ruler that Pollock, who had been also peremptorily ordered by Sir Jasper Nicholls to retreat, wrote, stating with sarcastic emphasis, that the retirement would involve the sacrifice of the captives, to say nothing of an additional loss of prestige. To this the Governor-General replied, reiterating the order to evacuate the country, but giving the two generals permission to select their own route.

General Pollock and Nott, being officers who placed the honour of their country above all other considerations, and having implicit confidence in their men, were not long in devising a plan, which enabled them to fulfil his lordship's instructions and still preserve the honour of the country.

On August 10th General Pollock left Jellalabad to return to India. He did not make for his destination in as straight a line as the Governor-General or Sir Jasper Nicholls would have liked, for he marched to Jugdulluk. Finding there a strong force of Ghilzees he at once attacked them.

The British soldier is, as a rule, no politician, but tell him that as the country is to be evacuated, the chances of engaging the enemy will be strictly limited and he realises that he is expected to do his work thoroughly when the time comes.

Tommy, being fully persuaded that there was something wrong in Calcutta, resolved to put matters right in Afghanistan. So our men buckled to. They stormed apparently inaccessible positions, they climbed towering heights, and routed the Ghilzees from positions regarded as impregnable. In short, Mr. Atkins showed such zeal that day that Akbar Khan became so alarmed, that after sending his captives into Turkistan, he collected a large army and met us at Tezeer, the very pass in which a few months before so many of our poor fellows had been massacred.

It was a great mistake for Akbar to fix on Tezeer as a battle ground, for the moment our men heard the truth they literally burned for the fray to begin. What cared they if the plains were alive with the enemy's cavalry and that their footmen swarmed in the hills? The more there were, the more there would be to kill. So the moment they caught sight of the enemy they rushed pell mell at them.

The Afghans, being as clever as the Boers in taking cover, strove to check their advance. But what hope was there of preventing our men reaching the top when at every step they passed the skeletons of their dead comrades? It is said that what with emotion and excitement, our men's faces were bathed in perspiration and tears when they reached the top. Then they wiped their faces and chased the enemy from off those frowning hills. They felt, at last, that the army was fulfilling its mission, and an "Army of Retribution" it did prove itself to be that day.

Akbar and his chiefs, knowing that on the issue of this battle depended the fate of the capital and their relatives, fought with an energy of despair. If they had been wise they would have removed the corpses of their victims beforehand

Next day the troops, maddened by the horrible sights which met their gaze, literally drove the enemy before them right through the formidable pass of Khurd

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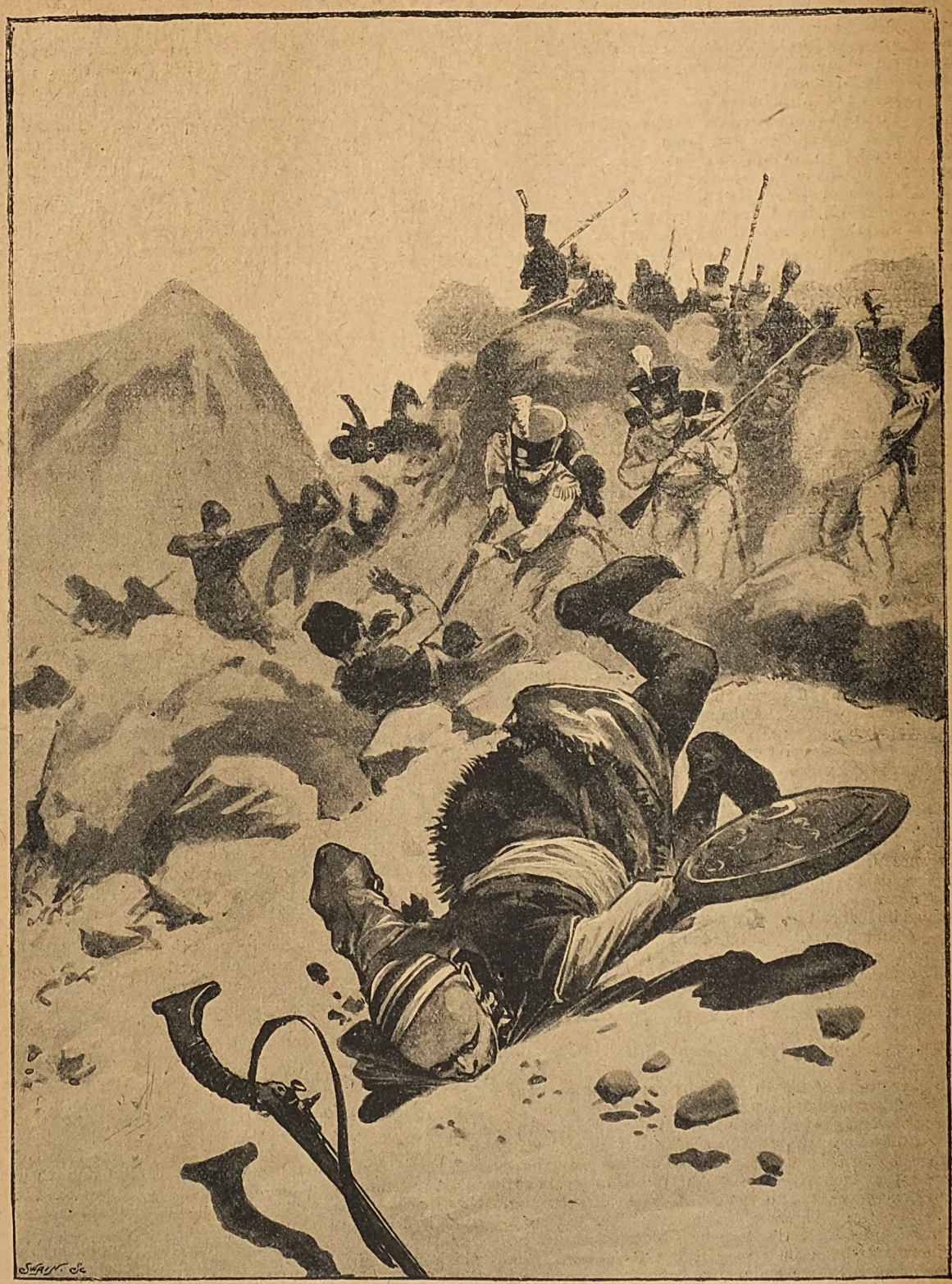

They chased the enemy from off those frowning hills.

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Kabul. They strove to delay us by seizing various strong posts in the heights above, but as the day wore on the fury of our men so got on their nerves that, despite all the exertions of Akbar and his chiefs, the Afghans took to flight.

They screwed their courage up at Buth-huk, but the stern, set faces, and the bayonets of our men dislodged them so effectually, that finding the road clear, General Pollock, on August 14th, pitched his tents outside Cabul, and two days later, with his staff and a strong escort, entered the Bala Hissar. There were shorter ways to India than the way he had travelled, but as a band playing "God Save the Queen" in the streets of Cabul was the quickest way of restoring the prestige of Britain, General Pollock was quite prepared to risk the displeasure of his official superiors.

Curiously enough, General Nott, having also arranged to return to India *via* Cabul, evacuated Candahar, August 7th, 1842, leaving the city in the hands of Sufder Jung, son of Shah Soojah, the potentate we had foolishly forced on the Afghans. Determined not to be outdone by Pollock's men, the soldiers of General Nott rushed with such inconceivable fury on every fort in their road that the nerves of the defenders got into as bad a state as those of their countrymen who had fought Pollock's beauties, as they were called.

When Lord Ellenborough heard that Nott had reached Ghaznee, he evidently thought it time to identify himself with the avenging movement, so he ordered General Nott to bring away the gates of Sommauth adorning the tomb of Guzerat. A more monstrous exhibition of folly, a more shameless act of desecration, was never perpetrated. The gates were of no service to us, whilst to the Afghans they were beyond price.

Cowed as the Afghans were, the news that Nott had stolen the gates from the sacred tomb stirred into life the dying embers of their resistance.

Driven at last on to the plains below, they sustained such a crushing defeat that Nott was free to turn his attention to Shumshoodan Khan, who, after the destruction of Ghazni, had retired to a range of strong mountain posts at Nayden. Although these strongholds were not on the road to India, Nott made his way there, fighting a series of battles for their capture. The posts all destroyed and the Afghans dispersed, Nott now made for Cabul, to unite his forces to those of General Pollock.

The great object of the campaign had now to be achieved. Akbar had removed all his prisoners from Cabul on August 25th, compelling not only the officers and men, but even the ladies and children, to travel day and night without cessation. Their clothing was insufficient, and the food supplied was of the poorest quality; but of that Akbar thought nothing. His aim was to get them to Bamecan, on the other side of the snow-capped Hindu Kush.

Sir Richard Shakespeare and 600 horse were at once dispatched in pursuit of the fugitives, with instructions to use every means to overtake them. On the following day Sir Robert Sale and a strong force of infantry followed hot foot.

Akbar Khan had left word that the prisoners were to be murdered if we ever took them; but, fortunately for the rescuing party, Saleh Muhammed, their gaoler, was one of those Asiatics whose love of gold was even greater than his hatred of the English dog. He met the troopers twenty miles from the fort where they were confined, and spurned with disdain the first offer of Sir Richard Shakespeare; but when the bribe was increased to a lakh of rupees to give up the captives, he hesitated. Two days later he produced a letter from Akbar, ordering him to transfer the prisoners to the charge of Usbeg, chief of the Khulumans.

The pursuers, knowing nothing of the infamous character this worthy bore, made Saleh no further offer. This so staggered Akbar's agent that he returned to his prisoners, and told them who their gaoler was to be. They at once wrote to the pursuing party, who, being greatly alarmed, now played their last card. They produced a letter from General Pollock in which that officer promised if Saleh Muhammed would secure the release of the captives, to give him 20,000 rupees and a pension for life of 1,000 more. Saleh's cupidity was now thoroughly roused. "I know nothing of General Pollock," he cried, "but if you three gentlemen will swear by your Saviour to make good to me this offer, I will deliver my prisoners over to you."

The officers agreed; but Saleh, still mistrustful, again sought the captives, one of whom drew up in Persian an agreement, to which all the others affixed their signatures, promising that the sum named by General Pollock should be paid. This done, Akbar allowed himself to be arrested, the governor of the fort where the captives were was deposed, and the Union Jack hoisted.

The danger, however, was not yet passed, and this they knew. Confronting the surrounding tribesmen with the utmost *sang-froid*, the little party marched to Tophee Bala, and with breathless anxiety awaited the approach of their deliverers. At length a letter arrived from Sir R. Shakespeare, and the little band hurried on to meet him.

The company reached Cabul on September 21st, 1842. The entire British force turned out to receive them, and a salute of twenty-one guns was fired. It is said that the scene was one of the most pathetic ever witnessed. The ten rescued ladies fainted from excess of joy, and tears rolled unchecked down the cheeks of the strong men looking on. One of the captives, Captain Bygrave, was missing, but Akbar, who had personally detained this officer, sent him in a day or two after.

Smarting under the numerous defeats they had sustained, the Afghans were not likely to allow us to retreat without an endeavour at all events to recover the stolen gates. Hearing that Amun-Kha-Khan was collecting the scattered remnants of the Afghan Army, General Pollock dispatched General McCaskill to attack Istalif, the place of meeting. The vineyards of Istalif, a beautifully situated town, afforded admirable cover for the Afghan sharp-shooters. Very curiously the plan of the battle was conceived by Captain, afterwards Sir Henry Havelock, of Indian Mutiny fame.

Havelock's idea was to allow the enemy to collect in the vineyards in the belief that he would attack them there. The moment the Afghans saw the British columns marching stolidly in that direction, they hastened with great precipitation to the aid of their comrades. Before they could realise what was happening, our men were rushing the village of Ismillah, the key of the position. The enemy made one effort to retrieve their mistake, but they received such a severe handling that, being by now thoroughly demoralised, they took to flight.

The "Army of Retribution" having now amply avenged their past defeats, prepared to retire. This so alarmed Futteh Jung, son of Shah Soojah, that he at once vacated what he called the "seat perilous" and returned with us to India.

Next week: "The Crimean War."

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Mr. Bowser's Tribulations.

XXXVI.—HIS MOTHER-IN-LAW ARRIVES AND SPEAKS HER MIND.

On his way home the other evening, Mr. Bowser had his feet stepped on, his hat knocked off, and his ribs poked by umbrellas, and by the time he reached home he was ready for a row. To add fuel to his feelings, he found that his mother-in-law had arrived two hours before and was comfortably installed at the head of affairs, while Mrs. Bowser had gone to bed with a headache. Formal greetings had scarcely been exchanged when he said:

"What's all this twaddle about headache? When I left the house this morning, Mrs. Bowser was as chirpy as a cricket. Mighty funny that a headache should flop her into bed all at once."

"There's nothing funny about it," promptly replied the mother-in-law. "She had a nervous headache, and I told her to go to bed. She looks to me as if her nerves were all racked to pieces, and she ought to go home with me for a year."

"That's all nonsense. Her nerves are all right—as right as mine. She's probably been sloshing around in the rain and got her feet wet, and if so, she will get no pity from me."

"You are not asked or expected to pity her, sir, and if you want any dinner, you'd better eat it now. I found the cook very lazy and impudent and trying to run things to suit herself, and therefore I discharged her. I've managed to cook a little something myself, however."

"You—you discharged the cook at an hour's notice!" he exclaimed, with flushed face.

"I gave her seventeen minutes to get out. I'd like to see a cook or anyone else trying to walk over my daughter."

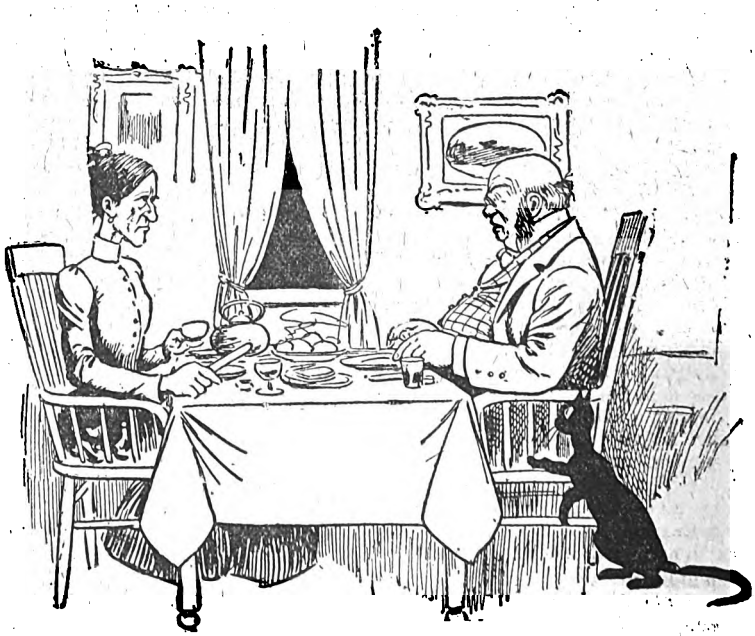
Mr. Bowser sat down to the table, with his gorge in his throat. The mother-in-law had thrown down the gauntlet, and he had picked it up.

"Here is the dinner," she exclaimed, as she brought it from the kitchen. "This is one of my Irish stews, and I know you'll like it."

"A stew for dinner!" he gasped, as his eyes began to roll.

"Certainly, and not much besides; but if it's good enough for me it's good enough for you. I've heard about your finding fault with your dinners, but you can either eat this or let it alone. When a man gets the idea that a house is run for his benefit only, it's time he was brought to book."

Mr. Bowser meant to jump up and pound on the table and declare that he was master of his own house, and wouldn't eat Irish stew for dinner if he starved to death; but, to his intense surprise, he not only clung to his chair, but found himself eating the stew. There was something in the icy glare of the woman that had a restraining influence on his impetuosity. The coffee was weak and the potatoes underdone, and he had opened his mouth to declare that he wouldn't ask a dog to sit down to such a meal, when the mother-in-law fastened her eyes on him and said:



There was something in the icy glare of the woman that had a restraining influence on his impetuosity.

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"You just keep quiet and be thankful for what you've got. I've known husbands to make a dinner on raw turnips!"

The pudding was flavoured with vanilla, and had Mrs. Bowser been there, Mr. Bowser would have made her heart ache for a month, but those icy eyes checked his outbreak, and even compelled him to eat rather generously. It was only when dinner was finished and they had returned to the sitting-room, that he determined to shake off the incubus, and assert his independence.

"I think I'll go over to the club for two or three hours this evening," he observed, as he toyed with the cat.

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" replied the mother-in-law, as she turned on him. "You'll sit here and see if a doctor is wanted, or if there are any errands to be done. The idea of your loafing around a club when your wife is almost too sick to speak! If you had a soft corn on your toe, the whole house would have to hover over you."

Mr. Bowser choked and strangled in his indignation, and the cat grinned and said to herself that things would break loose pretty soon.

"And I've heard," continued the woman, as her teeth clicked together, "that you play cards at the club, and sometimes lose as much as two or three pounds of an evening. I wish you were my husband for about an hour! You'd never play cards more than once."

"Did you come here to insult and abuse me?" demanded Mr. Bowser, with a flash of independence.

"I came out here to put things right, and I shall do it," she sternly replied.

Then followed a powerful silence, broken at last by his going down to the cellar to nail a board on the coal-bin. He had just started to drive a nail, when the mother-in-law appeared on the stairs, and said:

"Drop that hammer like a hot potato! Don't you know that every blow goes through your poor wife's head with a bang? You've got about as much heart in you as a rhinoceros."

"Woman, how dare you talk to me like that!" he shouted as his face grew as white as flour.

"Don't call me 'woman' and yell out that way," she replied. "No bully can frighten me. If you want something to do, go up and sit with your wife while I wash up the dishes."

Mr. Bowser sulked for a few minutes and then walked upstairs. Finding Mrs. Bowser asleep, he thought it would be a good thing to overhaul his wardrobe. He had scarcely pulled out one of the drawers when he discovered a sock with a hole in the heel. Indignation overcame him on the instant, and he flourished the sock on high and exclaimed:

"So this is the way my house is run, is it! Here's a sock that I bought new two weeks ago and never had on my foot, and yet someone has worn a hole in the heel!"

"Is—is it you?" asked Mrs. Bowser, as she woke up.

"Yes; it is me, and what about this sock? Look at it! Behold this specimen of wifely interest in her husband's welfare! Is it any wonder——"

The mother-in-law appeared at that moment, and, pointing to the stairs, she said:

"You and your holey sock get out o' this as fast as you can!"

Mr. Bowser went. Something in her he feared—some element of mastery; but as they returned to the sitting-room he shook off the feeling, and hoarsely whispered;

"There is a train at 10 o'clock in the morning! you can go b that!"

"If I do, it'll be as a corpse!" she grimly replied. "Sit down there! Now, then, I want to tell you a few things. You are a bullying husband, and it would do you good to be hit across the neck with a crowbar. You think you know a lot, and you are bound to have your way with everybody. No other woman in this world, except your wife, would live with you two hours, and she's a fool for doing it. You never come home except to kick about something, and if I was your wife, I'd scald you. You talk about waste and extravagance, and yet you'd buy sand for sugar if left alone. You browbeat and roar and bellow, but in a week I'll have you as humble as a cat. It's all in the right woman getting hold of you."

"And you'll stay a week," groaned Mr. Bowser.

"Four of them!" she replied. "And I'll work a remarkable change in you, or know the reason why. It won't do you a mite of good to roll your eyes, gnash your teeth, and crack your toes. Don't go upstairs again till bedtime, and if there's any more rows over holey socks, you'll go bare-foot in your shoes the rest of the winter!"

She went to the kitchen to finish the dishes, and the cat crept over to Mr. Bowser and rubbed against his leg and purred in sympathy. The room seemed to stifle him, and he got up and walked softly down the hall and out on the step, followed by the cat, and they sat down side by side on the step and gazed into vacancy. A tramp halted at the gate and asked for a penny to get victuals for his vitals, but Mr. Bowser and the cat gazed on—gazed at vacancy, and realised that the end of the world was close at hand.

M. Quad.

"A KEEPER OF SECRETS."

Splendid series of complete stories begins next week.

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A MODEL ROMANCE.

"Sir," said Dr. Johnson, "let me show you a model."

"Oh, Mr. Ormond, I am so tired of this position. I wish you could let me have a rest. Do—there's a good fellow—please."

"Wait just five minutes, Polly, till I've done this bit of your head. Don't move—just one minute more. I'm getting it right now, and then we'll knock off for a bit."

The request was the request of a model; the answer was the answer of a painter. The model reclined, in a half-kneeling attitude, apparently at the foot of a cross. Her clasped hands were uplifted; her eyes were upraised pathetically; her long hair streamed down, flowingly, over neck and shoulders; a loose white sort of shirt clothed her to the waist; below was a reddish brown skirt, skilfully disposed as "drapery," in artful folds. The whole attitude and expression represented—and represented well—imploring agony combined with tender despair. The bare arms were beautifully disposed, the eyes gleamed with a sublime splendour.

The painter—my friend Frank Ormond, A.R.A.— is working with quiet excitement at his easel. His figure is tall; he wears the velvet coat of his craft; he—but why describe him? Everybody knows Frank Ormond. Let that pass.

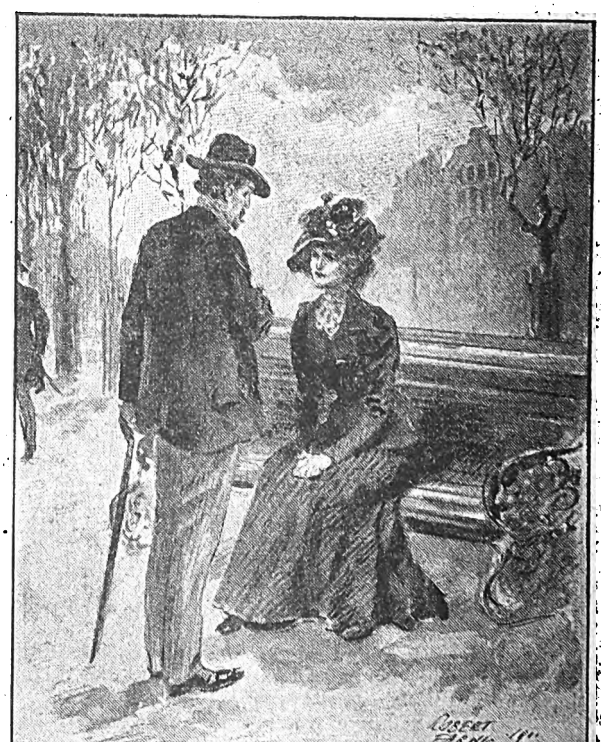
And now, reader, while painter and model (the attitude was a trying one) have "knocked off" work for a little rest, while he lights a pipe, and she, yawningly, stretches her stiff and weary limbs, let us look round us at the delicious litter of a painter's studio.

The house is old, and dates, probably, from Queen Anne's days. It has, no doubt, been the habitation of nobles of that period. You cannot see much of the walls, but look at the doors, at the painted ceiling, at the splendid marble mantelpiece. Look at the deep window-places and tall, thick-sashed windows. It is a house which Hogarth might have used for the residence of Lord Squanderfield.

The studio is a large three-windowed room, cold and bare of aspect. The backs of canvases framed with deal lie about like bits of scenes out of use, and suggest somewhat the *coulisses* of a theatre. A lay figure with a wooden fixedness of aspect, its head reminding one of a ship's figure-head, sits in a renaissance chair, and wears a thirteenth century costume. This figure forms the principal still-life object in the room. In one corner reposes the major part of an old suit of armour, the dull and dinted breastplate surmounted, in a rather drunken way, by a rust-red helmet. A bell-hilted rapier, *temp.* Elizabeth, which, says Frank, might have belonged to Raleigh, leans against the wall, and near it is a small sword which suggests the tea-cup times of Anne, the flowing wig and stiff skirts, the figure of Addison, or the brawling Mohocks who stopped Swift's chair.

From the open door of a richly carved dark *armoire* depends a Japanese robe. Plaster casts of feet and hands, busts, masks, and a torso, with the muscles strongly accented by dust, are sprinkled about, and contrast chalkily with the colour of the hangings, bits of silk dresses, and a remnant of tapestry. Two old foils, one broken, and both grievously damaged, lie across the arms of a magnificent antique chair, which has a seat of faded crimson velvet, on which rest a Spanish mandolin and one boxing glove; while a strip of yellow Chinese silk has slipped down on to the floor. A stuffed monkey, with a perennially diabolical smile upon a swollen visage, balances uneasily upon legs with a padded look about them, while a stuffed owl stares glassily in sullen gravity.

The bust of one Roman emperor is crowned with a



He spoke to her, and proposed that she should come and sit to him.

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Vandyke hat, and a white petticoat is supported by two Velasquez boar-spears. A very handsome oak table, with massive legs, is covered with Venetian glasses and Flemish bottles, with "pots" of various sorts, comprising Gris de Flandres, Satsuma jars, and the blue lange Lizen, or six-mark Japanese ware, while an exquisite little Japanese cabinet is crested by a handful of peacock's feathers.

Sketches in charcoal and in oils, copies of world-renowned pictures, studies, unfinished paintings, are strewn about in picturesque and grotesque confusion; and, finally, at one end of the room, with the best light falling full upon it, stands the guillotine-like easel on which rests *the* picture of the hour, the canvas which absorbs all Frank Ormond's thoughts and is freighted with all his ambition, the picture upon which he is now working.

And so the happy painter works from year to year — labour, completion, weariness, fruition, recommencement. His whole work and hope are concentrated, for the time, upon the picture with which he remains face to face for many lonely months.

It is finished at last, finished just when it must be completed in order to be sent in to the Acadamy; and then the reaction of lassitude after long tension begins. His work has gone out from him; the painter feels weary of the picture over which he has felt so many fluctuations of depression and delight. It has absorbed so much of himself that he cannot judge it truly; he alternates between confidence and despondency; he sighs half with regret half in relief, as his distracting darling is carried forth from his doors. Then he relaxes the long strain of anxious labour; he amuses himself, and half forgets his art; he works but little, if at all.

She shook hands cheerily, and then shut the studio door for the last time.

The picture gets well hung; then comes the private view, with the critics; then the public crowding about the shining rows in the splendid gallery; then follow the favourable notice, the praise of friends, the sneer of "brother" rivals; then all this passes away, until, after due relaxation, the painter recommences with renewed ardour his work so beautiful and loved.

A painter, by the way, has one great advantage over an author—he is sure of his spectators, of his public. If his work be hung in a good exhibition it is sure to be seen by all those whom the painter would wish to see it. An author has to go to his readers; but his spectators always come to a painter.

Meanwhile Frank, twisting his moustache as he gazes on his picture, and now and then throwing in a deft and rapid touch of the brush, is waiting until his model shall have rested in order to go on.

"Bother the skirt!" cries that young person, who, with a view to warming herself, has been dancing about the studio trying a burlesque pas which she had seen on the previous evening at the theatre. "There, Mr. Ormond, I'm rested now. On we go again."

The little model interested me, both in her individualism and as a member of a class which furnishes to the artist the materialism of the romantic. I tried to learn something of her history, but I succeeded only sketchily and in a piecemeal manner.

Her name was Polly Brown. She was distinctly pretty and piquante. She possessed, among her various merits as a model, very long and beautiful brown hair, which she knew how to dishevel and tumble down far below her waist in a flow of romantic distress.

Her eyes, brown also, were large and full of soft fire; and the little monkey had a trick of rendering them plaintive and pathetic in expression, so that she was particularly valuable as a model for young heroines in distress, virgin martyrs, betrayed beauties, and the like. Her complexion was that of a light brunette; had she lived more in the country her cheeks would, it is probable, have shown a little flush of tender red through the pale, soft olive of her tient. She had a nice little nose; the mouth was good, though perhaps a little large, but she knew how to purse it up, and to draw the corners down so as partially to conceal this little defect.

The shape of the little half-arch, half-tender face was a fine oval, and the head was remarkably well set on. She was good in profile, but better as a three-quarter face with up-turned eyes. Her hands and feet were small, and the figure, though a trifle petite, was round and well shaped. Her manner was always merry, but never boisterous, and the girl had innate tact and taste.

"Yes," observed Frank critically, "she is a first-rate model in her line. It is only when you see a good deal of her that you detect the least little *soupçon* of vulgarity, which comes no doubt from her mother. Do you know I rather like that little suspicion of plebeianism; it shows that her base touches the people. She is good, you know, for historical heroines. She is fit, in fact, for what actors call the juvenile tragedy line of business. Do you remember my Olivia in the Vicar of Wakefield? Well, she sat, and did splendidly, for that. She's always punctual and pleasant to deal with; she's lively and

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frisky but never rude, and she's really a good little girl. Out of all the mode's I know, she's about the best. I like little Polly; if you want to please her you've only got to send her to the play."

The little model had considerable imitative and dramatic talent, and readily picked up the trick of her trade. She quickly caught a painter's idea, and produced the expression, or caught the attitude which his purpose required. She had a little feminine voice, almost as exquisitely dainty as Marie Wilton's, and had conquered that difficulty, so great to one of her class, of a good pronunciation.

Polly's mother was housekeeper in a set of chambers. She had been on the stage in her youth, and retained a strong passion for the theatre. Of her father I could learn nothing.

Polly, herself, in her early girlhood, had been theatrical. She danced as a fairy in pantomimes, and formed one of a child group of peasants, or what not, as required by the ballet master, but to her disappointment she never could obtain a "speaking part." One winter a severe illness threw her out of her usual employment.

When she recovered she found no opening in the theatre, and she was for a short time driven to resort to sewing. She was then engaged in the extensive and prosperous outfitting establishment of Messrs. Abednego and Menchisadek; but this miserably paid drudgery did not long suit Miss Polly. She was unhappy, and grew desperate, or rather determined.

Sanguine in her youthful hopefulness, she suddenly discharged herself, and trusted to the chapter of accidents. One day, when very poor, Polly strolled into the Park.

Sitting down upon a bench, still and quiet as an Arctic winter night, she thought and thought what she could do to earn her living.

It was early spring; the painters were hard at work for the Academy, and good models were scarce. Frank Ormond happened to be passing by. He wanted a girl-model, and his painter's eye was struck by little Polly's face and figure. He spoke to her, and proposed that she should come and sit to him. Polly consented, and went the next morning to his studio. She had found a new trade, which she rather liked, and which, as she gradually acquired a connection among painters, paid her moderately well.

She grew attached to the free and easy Bohemian ways of the studio, and was soon launched as a well-known and popular "model," in which capacity, while sitting for Joan of Arc, I first made her acquaintance.

Polly, by the way, always had a superstition about the Park, and believed that it was a place which "brought her good luck."

"I first met you, Mr. Ormond, in the Park," she used at times to say, "and I am sure that some day some great good fortune will happen to me in that dear old Park. I often sit upon that bench where you first saw me. Ah, I was badly off then!"

The life of a model is not without perils and temptations to a young girl; but Polly trod safely her rather dangerous path with a firm, light step. Her innocence was not ignorance; for she saw and heard a great deal, and understood all that she saw or heard.

Without protectors or advisers, lonely but self-reliant, the girl walked along the edge of unfenced precipices circumspectly and shrewdly. She was ardent, and perhaps ambitious, but had a certain integrity of will and quiet force of character which held her upright. Very unconsciously, the little lowly thing was a sort of worldly heroine.

Natural character and the influence of the circumstances which surrounded and moulded it, produced some rather complex contradictions and problems in our model. Seen in some aspects, you would have pronounced her to be a little good-for-nothing; merry and pleasant, indeed, but worthless. Yet you would have judged her wrongly had you based an opinion upon the superficial trivialities which she turned outside.

She never made any pretence of goodness; she rather took pains to show her worst side, to appear much worse than she really was. She had naturally a light side to her character, and she emphasized her levity in all that she showed of herself to others.

Nor was she, at times, wholly free from passing thrills

"By Jove!" cried Frank, "but women are wonderful creatures."

of temptation; but, like the needle of the compass, which, though it vibrates tremulously yet ultimately points always rightly, she gravitated back infallibly to good.

A creature by no means too bright or good for human nature's daily food, there was in her that "mystic sense of right" which so stirred the enthusiasm of the German philosopher. Exposed to so much danger, sustained by so little help against evil, some unseen power kept this girl always really pure and good.

She had, no doubt, a *tendresse* for Frank Ormond, but then her shrewd practical sense showed her that there was, as she termed it, "no use" in indulging such a feeling; and, taught by the hard lessons of her life, she had learned to repress, to restrain, and to forego.

One morning, when Frank was just finishing his

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well-known picture of the execution of Lady Jane Grey, in which Polly, of course, "sat" for the victim Queen, the young lady, at the conclusion of the sitting, said very quietly:

"You won't want me any more, Mr. Ormond. You've finished that picture, head and all, now. I'm glad of it; because I shouldn't be able to come to you again."

"Not come again, Polly—why not? I suppose you are very full of engagements just now; but you mustn't throw me over. I shall want you next week for my 'Dorothea.'"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Ormond, but I shan't ever be able to come again."

"Not be able to come again—what the deuce do you mean, Polly?" asked Frank rather pettishly, as he relieved the headsman with a deft touch. "I suppose you're getting too rich?—no, it can't be that. You must come. There's no model at all like you for some of my work. Ah, I see! you've been spooning with some fellow; or in trouble, eh, Miss Poll?"

"No," replied the young lady with demure dignity, "no trouble, thank you, Mr. Frank. The fact is—I can't come be'ause—because I'm going to be married."

"Married—whew!" cried the painter, facing round from the easel and taking his pipe out of his mouth. "Married, Polly! I never heard about that—who is it? What sort of fellow? A good one, I hope, for your sake."

"Never mind. Mr. Frank," responded Miss Polly composedly. "Perhaps you'll know some day, but not now. Thank you for all your kindness, Mr. Ormond. You've always been very kind to me, and I—I like you very much. Yes; I'm doing very well, thank you. He is a good fellow—I like him and I mean that we shall be very happy. But when I am married I can't sit again any more, if you please."

Frank Ormond growled discontentedly. He did not like losing his model, and he felt a vague jealousy of the unknown. There was a sneer in his tone as he said:

"I suppose, Polly, you have caught some old fool, who is taken with a pretty face, and your union will be about as incongruous as woodbine twining round a wooden leg."

"Think what you like, Mr. Ormond," said little Polly calmly. "I know what you do think; but never mind that. I shall tell you just nothing about it. I only came to-day" (Polly was tying on her bonnet) "because I knew you wanted me to finish your 'Lady Jane Grey.' That's done now, and I must say good-bye. I'm very grateful to you, Frank, I am, indeed, for all your kindness. I'm sorry to have to give up coming to the studio—I liked the life—but it's all over now. Thank you—six shillings; yes, that's right. My career as a model is ended. Once more—good-bye, Mr. Frank."

She shook hands cheerily, and then shut the studio door for the last time.

The strange thing was, that the little witch had made a good marriage. She had won the affections of a good man, of position and property.

The reticent little monkey never told anyone about her courtship, or the progress of it; but once, some time after, she betrayed herself so far as smilingly to tell Frank, when she met him in society, that the whole thing began "in the Park, in that dear old Park; on the old bench—you know"; and this was the alpha and omega of her confession.

Many studios were for a time corroded by curiosity; but time had to wear this feeling away without other artificial solacement. Some painters expressed anger at losing their little model; others expressed perplexity at her rise in life; but no one could drop a hint about her fair fame, and, as she had been generally liked, many good wishes accompanied her change of position.

Like that Mattie, sometime a "near cousin o' the Laird of Limmerfield's," and who, when elevated to the position of Mrs. Bailie Nicol Jarvie, "behaved excellently in her exaltation," little Polly made a model wife. She had all a woman's pliability, adaptability, and tact; and she soon picked up the style and manners necessary to her new position.

She was naturally graceful, and she had a little touch of woman's pride; pride in herself, and pride for her husband. She wished to make her husband happy, and was determined that he should not have to blush for his choice. She set to work, too, to educate herself in her way.

Having a strong motive to impel her, and great natural quickness, she soon succeeded in acquiring a respectable veneer of culture; and Frank Ormond, who meets her from time to time, told me that she had developed and improved in an altogether surprising manner. I believe that she succeeded, without apparent effort, in educing from Mr. Frank the respect due to her new position, rather than the familiarity likely to arise from their old relations, and yet she was quite frank, and kind, and natural, with him.

"By Jove!" cried Frank, "when I took her down to dinner the other day at the Howards', I could hardly believe that the self-possessed, lady-like woman by whom I was sitting had ever been the little monkey that used so often to dance burlesque dances about my studio! But women are wonderful creatures, sir. Their knowledge of the world beats ours. If they were only a good actresses on the stage as they are off it, the dramatic art would be in a fine way."

Success ripens and improves some natures; and little Polly was decidedly improved by good fortune. She was always pretty, but as I saw her the other day in the Park (looking out, probably not without thoughts, for a certain bench), reclining easily in her carriage, she appeared positively elegant and *distinguée*. She was particularly well-dressed, and had a piquante touch of *grande dame* in her manner.

Does anyone who has ever really belonged to Bohemia pass out of it into Philistia, or even into higher regions, without an occasional retrospect of regret, and a backward glance, coupled with a sigh?

Did our Polly, lolling upon her easy carriage cushions, ever look back with a little tinge of sadness to the days in which she used to trudge on foot, through mud and rain, to the stage-door, or to the painter's studio? What does she think when she visits the Royal Academy? How does she feel when she goes to the theatre?

Does she ever speculate upon the new model (the golden-haired one) who now sits to Frank Ormond?

Does she, as she gazes upon the "Amaranthine Bowers of Boundless Joy," recall the feelings of the figurantes who, clothed in sheeny tinsel, float ethereally upon iron supports in the ideal atmosphere of blue and red lights?

I do not know; I have no hint which would enable me to solve the problem; but I am assured that she is gratefully happy in her married life; and that, as a wife, she is still a *model*.

H. Schutz-Wilson.

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SHORT STORIES THAT MAKE YOU LAUGH.

We devote every week two pages of *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "The Keepers of the People," by Edgar Jepson, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, February 25th. Post-cards only, please.

The Prize of One Guinea for the best Storyette has been won this week by Mr. W. BARROW, of 16 St. John's Terrace, Lewes.

Ideal and Real.

SMITHE was about to pop the momentous question to the girl of his choice, and was trying to decide how he should do it.

First, he thought of the knightly proposal in the style of the Middle Ages.

"By my halidame, fair maid, say thou wilt be mine, and the holy friar shall unite us ere another sun gilds the turrets of yonder castle?"

Then he considered the theatrical style:

"I have long loved you in secret, g-ur-r-l, and, though I am not rich, I can offer you the true and unselfish devotion of me whole ha-a-r-r-t!"

He thought, perhaps, the easy conversational style might do:

"Well, Alicia—I may call you 'Alicia,' mayn't I?—everyone thinks we are going to be married. Suppose we do get married, just to please 'em, you know?"

But, when the critical time came, he did it thus:

"Er—Miss Alicia—er—excuse the familiarity, but—er—er—will you—er—oh, by Jove!"

And then she came to the rescue, and said:

"That'll do, Billy, dear boy; it's all serene, and I know the old folk will be pleased." W. B.

The Left was Right.

"WEEL, John, how are you to-day?" said a Scotch minister to one of his parishioners on meeting him on the road.

"Gey weel, sir; gey weel," responded John cautiously, "gin it wa sna for the rheumatis' in my richt leg."

"Ah, weel, John, be thankful, for there is no mistake you are getting old, like the rest of us, and old age, you know, doesn't come alone."

"Auld age, sir!" returned John; "I won'er tae hear ye. Auld age has naething tae dae wi't. Here's my ither leg just as auld, an' it's quite soond and soople yet." C. R. F.

War and Peace.

A WELL-KNOWN dramatist, calling a friend's attention to the thinness of the house at one of his own plays, added that he supposed it was "owing to the war."

"No," replied the latter, "it is owing to the piece." T. J. W.

A Good Brand.

ONE morning during the siege of Ladysmith, the Boers on the heights commanding the town heliographed the following message to the men of the Naval Brigade:

"Good-morning, shipmates, got any bacca?"

To which the tars promptly signalled back:

"We've got plenty of Lambton's Navy Cut in prime condition, come down and get a pipeful."

But the Boers weren't having any. H. E. L.

Zeal Rewarded.

A POLICEMAN in a country village, whose "cases" were rare, one day came across his landlord in an incapable state. The chance was too good to be missed and the landlord was summoned and fined to the amount of fourteen shillings and sixpence.

The fine was paid, but the policeman's feelings can be better imagined than described, when, on reaching home, he found his rent had been raised sixpence per week, and so it continued for twenty-nine weeks, when the landlord coolly informed him that "he had paid the fine and could have his house at the former rent."

E. L.

Satisfied.

AT a rifle range a clerical gentleman rode up, and, addressing the sergeant in charge, complained that bullets had fallen into his garden, in a village a mile or so in the rear of the butts. The "old soldier," with a wink to his comrades, replied:

"I'll see that it doesn't happen again, sir; I'll put a man on the top of the hill with special orders to stop the bullets from going over."

"Oh, thank you, very much!" responded the ecclesiastic with a satisfied smile, and rode off with the air of a man relieved of a mighty anxiety.

H. R.

Through the Telephone.

"ARE you there?"
"Yes."
"Who are you, please?"
"Watt."
"What is your name, please?"
"Watt's my name."
"Yes; what is your name?"
"I say my name is Watt."
"Oh, well, I'm coming to see you this afternoon."
"All right. Are you Jones?"
"No; I'm Knott."
"Who are you, then, please?"
"I'm Knott."
"Will you tell me your name, please?"
"Will Knott."
"Why won't you?"
"I say my name is William Knott."
"Oh, I beg your pardon!"
"Then you'll be in this afternoon if I come round, Watt?"
"Certainly, Knott."

They were cut off by the exchange, and Knott wants to know if Watt will be in or not.

T. A. F.

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What Struck Him Most.

An Irish soldier, lately returned from Africa, and who was at the Battle of Spion Kop, had been relating his experiences at the engagement. After enlarging on his many hairbreadth escapes to his listeners, one of them asked him:

"Now, all throughout the desperate fighting, will you please tell us what struck you most forcibly when you came to think it over?"

"I can truly say, sor, that what sthruck me most forcibly was the bullets that missed me."

C. D.

His Distinguishing Mark.

A boy employed by an itinerant showman—who was noted for his bullying—had a rough time of it, and there was no love lost between them.

One day while busily employed scrubbing a performing dog belonging to the show, he was accosted by a stranger, who inquired where his master was.

"Oh," said the boy, "he's just gone into the monkey's cage—and—I say!" he shouted, as the man was walking off in the direction indicated, "you'll know him, 'cause he's got white whiskers!"

A. A. L.

Hint Not Taken.

A certain farmer in the Midlands dispatched his Irish servant with a note to his neighbour.

"Did you take the note, and did you see Mr. Thompson, Pat?"

"Yes, sor."

"And how was he?"

"Why, he looked pretty well; but shure he's very bloind."

"Blind? What do you mean?"

"Why, while I wur in the room he axed me where moi hat were, and sure it was entirely on my head, and myself straight in front of him all the whoile."

F. W.

"Good Gracious!"

A young soldier had gone to the theatre with a friend.

The play dragged, and he fell asleep. An hour later he was awakened by the voice of an actor, saying:

"We have been here five days!"

The infantryman got up in a fright, and said to his friend:

"Good gracious! and I had only leave to stop out till midnight!"

W. T.

It Brayed.

The other evening an individual of the know-everything type was airing his infinite knowledge in the presence of a number of rustics in the village inn.

Presently the subject turned upon superstitions, and after a lengthy discourse upon the various popular beliefs, such as spilling the salt, breaking up looking-glasses, etc., which was alleged to bring bad luck, our would-be oracle said:

"Again, gentlemen, when a donkey brays it is a sure sign of rain."

"Then, for goodness' sake, shut yer darned mouth," roared a bluff old farmer, "for I haven't got my crops in yet!"

W. L.

Tried to Please.

"Good gracious, Maria, another millinery bill? Why on earth you want so many new things I can't understand. Look at me. I have had nothing new on for the last three months."

"But men are different to women, and besides, you surely would not like your wife to look a fright before other people?"

"Certainly not, but at the same time you might get something tasty and pretty. It seems to me that the women of the present day exert themselves with more industry than sense in their efforts to be beautiful. Their insane efforts are simply outlandish."

"But one must follow the fashion; you know that, Will."

"Nonsense. Give me taste first. Why, Maria, you do not look nearly so pretty as you did when I first married you fifteen years ago."

"Oh, that's because I've grown older."

"Oh, no, it isn't that. I liked you in the simple dress of days gone by. You never look so pretty as you did then."

"Well, I will do my best to please."

The husband sat down with his paper whilst his wife bustled off to her boudoir to dress for a drive.

Shortly afterwards the voice of the latter was heard saying: "Are you ready, dear?"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the husband as he looked up from his paper. "What in the name of goodness have you been doing? Don't you know we're going out driving?"

She wore a very small hat, a large chignon, and strangely-proportioned masses of millinery, for which his vocabulary could find no phrase. A diminutive parasol completed the absurdity.

"I am only trying to please you, dear," she quietly replied.

"To please me?"

"Yes," was the reply. "It's the way I dressed fifteen years ago when we were married!"

P. B.

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One Week at Ardlene.

ARDLENE was a picturesque little village, nestled in the bosom of a lovely valley, upon the border-line between Monmouthshire and the Principality.

Surrounded, especially on the Welsh side, by hills, or rather mountains, and approachable only by a circuitous, and fairly dangerous road, leading from the nearest railway station, thirteen miles away, it was as sequestered and peaceful a spot as the heart, even of the most confirmed recluse, could desire.

There were not more than two dozen buildings in the place, inclusive of the church and school-house, the latter a small barn-like structure, with a little cottage attached.

Here, for nearly two years, had lived Alice Maylin, the schoolmistress and organist, with a child, a fine boy of six, known as Mervyn Stapleton, and supposed by the neighbourhood to be the delicate offspring of an old friend, consigned to her care.

Alice had been recommended to the vicar by a lady, to whose daughters she had formerly acted as governess. This lady, a personal and old friend of the Earl of Grassmere, a local magnate, had been greatly surprised at receiving from Alice Maylin a sudden notice to leave her charge, without the assignment of any reason whatever.

It was singular, too, that her departure was coincident with that of Viscount Harbleton, Lord Grassmere's eldest son, from Cardew Castle the family seat. The young nobleman left ostensibly for the Continent, while Alice disappeared altogether out of ken and knowledge.

When the Viscount returned, which he did in about twelve months' time, he had the usual "travellers' tales" wherewith to regale the dinner-table and the smoke-room. Some there were who thought that they could detect a false ring about them, for the eldest son of the house had a somewhat unenviable reputation for "long-bow" practice.

He was unpopular, too, both in and outside his family, the servants detesting him, while taking his tips. He had a distinct liking for "low life," so that with a certain class he was known as a "fine fellow," a "generous gentleman," and so on. Extravagant, vain, and some said vicious, he was the plague of his father's life, by reason of his debts, and disregard of family dignity and tradition.

All this occurred about seven years before the period of the present relation. The Viscount was now out in South Africa with his regiment; Alice Maylin, in her little restful nook at Ardlene, many miles from Cardew, and former associations.

There remained nearly five years of the girl's life unaccounted for, but she was silent concerning it, and all in her little retreat among the border hills respected her reserve.

No one in Ardlene questioned her claim to be other than she professed, more especially as she was a favourite with both young and old, rich and poor.

To sharp eyes it sometimes seemed that she had a mental trouble, but it was also noticed that when more than ordinarily depressed she would seek the old oak-panelled organ-loft across the road and there with soft impromptu, lay the spirit that oppressed her.

It was on one of these occasions that two gentlemen, with tourist knapsacks, and other and sundry signs, which marked them as a pair of indefatigable pedestrians, sat, lazily comfortable, upon a half-sunken altar tomb in the little churchyard, listening to the dreamy melody that floated out at open door and window upon the hot summer air.

"Say, Brent, that's a woman playing, I'll lay my life," said the elder of the two, a fair-featured, tallish man, with a pleasant smile, and apparently about thirty years of age, "what she is playing is better than a hymn, and quite as holy, if not more so."

"Yes," replied the other, "it's evidently a woman, and —a pretty one, I should say, if musical expression, and its impression upon the hearer mean anything at all."

"Nonsense! and yet, you may be right, for there's a good deal, I believe, in the influence of sweet sounds."

"Savage breast—charms—and all the rest of it. Oh! there's something in it, no doubt. Hullo! where are you off to George?"

The other had risen from the stone, and moved slowly towards the door of the church.

Hesitating a moment he entered.

The interior was dark to anyone coming in out of the bright sunlight, and for a short while he could distinguish nothing plainly.

Presently, almost immediately, indeed, the music ceased, and he saw a slight figure, with dark hair and eyes coming towards him.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I hope I have not disturbed you?"

"Oh, no!" she answered him, "I have been here too long; come Mervyn!"

The boy, who had lingered behind to exchange certain

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mysterious confidences with the organ-blower, came running up to her.

"Did you say Mervyn? Curious! That is an uncommon name, rather, isn't it? It is an hereditary one in my family."

"Indeed!" she said politely, but a little coldly, perhaps, for she was quite alive to the fact that the conversation was getting a trifle confidential as between strangers.

"Yes," he continued, affecting not to notice her manner, "our eldest sons are always named Mervyn. What a fine little chap!"

They had by this time strolled down the miniature aisle, and were standing in the porch. He could see that his travelling companion had vanished, probably in the direction of the inn.

"This is a quiet, beautiful little place," he ventured, seeing that she appeared disinclined to initiate conversation. "I and a friend are but passing through it on our way to Chester, but I think a week among these hills would do me good, and render me more fit to encounter the trials of London and the 'season.'"

This was a proposition Alice could not well assent to or appear to encourage. She merely inclined her head courteously, and made as if to cross the road to her own home.

The lad at her side here looked inquisitively up at the stranger, for strangers were rare in Ardlene.

George Stapleton-Cardew was by no means a fatalist, and certainly not superstitious, but he could not repress an exclamation of surprised interest.

"I fear," he said, "you will think me rude and intrusive, but will you tell me this little fellow's surname?"

"Stapleton," answered Alice, quietly, "and now we must leave you, for school is assembling."

With another inclination of the head, she, and the child, who turned his head more than once to look back at him, were gone.

He stood for some minutes, leaning against the porch front.

"Mervyn Stapleton! It can't surely, and yet must be chance. The boy's cast of feature is Cardew all over. He's the image, too, of Harbleton. But there, it's absurd! It can't be! Harbleton's a queer stick, I own, but I fancy even he would draw the line at matrimonial underhandedness. Well, I'll stop here, and try to fathom the mystery. Stop here a week at least. Brent may do as he chooses. If he leaves me here alone, so much the better."

On his way to the inn he cogitated still further with himself, this time Alice being the prevailing thought.

"A sweet girl that; and—a lady. Evidently the schoolmistress. How did she come to take that on, I wonder? Yes, I'll stay."

He found his friend, Brent, as he expected, at the inn, hungry, impatient, and curious; found him also to be quite disinclined to a prolonged stay at the primitive little spot.

"I'd be dead in twenty-four hours, George let alone a week. No, my boy, I'll get on to Chester to-morrow morning; though I do think it a bit shabby of you to desert your chum on the last "lap."

He was as good as his word, and was up and away while the day was young.

Much may be done in a week, and assuredly George made good use of the time.

Alice could not well escape meeting him within such narrow limits, and so it was that ere long she had to confess to herself to a decided liking for him. He was one of those reliable and strong natures which invariably attract women, (women worthy of the name that is). She was conscious long before the week was out that he loved her, while she began to feel that she could love h m, if only——

Ay! the "if" was large and ugly.

One evening after dinner he went out across the fields towards a fir wood that covered the lower slope of the hillside.

Half way he met her.

"Don't go home yet," he said, with just a suspicion of entreaty in his voi e. "I want to say something to you."

"Yes!" she answered, in that inartificial, simply-direct way that he so admired in her.

"Shall we go through the wood?" he asked.

"No, it seems freer in the fields. Besides it is getting late, and I must not wander too far from home."

"Miss Maylin! the fact, perhaps, may not interest you greatly, but I leave here to-morrow evening."

"I am sorry—I mean——"

"You are sorry, that is good to hear. Miss Maylin, Alice! I will not insult you by a long story, or fine language. What do you imagine my week here has taught me?"

"I cannot say."

"There you are wrong, and untrue to yourself. You know, you must know that this week has been a revelation to me, that during it, I have learned to love you. That——"

"Mr. Cardew, you are right; I am, and have been wrong. Wrong in listening to you, wrong in leading you to believe that which is altogether untrue."

"Impossible! I do not understand. My meaning was other than your interpretation of it. You would tell me, maybe, of obstacles, hindrances; is that so?"

"Yes, and I am sorry."

"What are they?"

"Is this not cruel of you? I should not have allowed you to say or to imply even so much had I not cared—a little—I mean——"

"That is enough!" he interrupted her masterfully. "Tell me all about it, and let me be the judge."

Then she told him.

How that seven years before, when, as a governess she lived in the neighbourhood of Cardew Castle, she met with, was wooed and won by Mervyn, Lord Harbleton.

Immediately after their private marriage, she threw up her engagement, and they left for a small house in the Upper Thames Valley.

For a time all went well. Then her husband developed habits of intemperance and savage irritability, which, on a certain occasion, soon after the birth of their son, broke out into open brutality.

He struck her, leaving a mark upon her forehead, (she raised her hair and showed it him) which she would carry to her grave.

George here stooped down and reverently kissed the spot; and she did not attempt to repel him.

All love for her husband, (for she had loved him) died upon the day that he lifted his hand to her. Disillusioned, desperate almost, she wrote him a letter during one of his many absenses from her, announcing her departure with her child.

From that hour she had never seen him, but George

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would of course now see how absolutely impossible was the realisation of his hopes.

One thing, and one only had weighed upon her mind, and continued to trouble her, her boy's future. By right he was next in succession to his unworthy father, and yet she dreaded the ordeal which must naturally follow upon a prosecution of his claim.

"Alice!" said George, "you must let me have the lad, that I may show him to his grandfather. I will so plead his cause that the Earl, who is a just man, must recognise his right to be considered a son of the house, as he must also render you that justice denied you by my cousin. Tell me, why is the boy named Stapleton only?"

"Because on our marriage, my husband, persuading me that to be wedded in the name of Cardew would jeopardise his position with his father, should he come to hear of it, wished us to be known as Mr. and Mrs. Stapleton, the license being in that name, and we also signing the register so."

"Alice, my cousin is a scoundrel. But there is no time to lose, my uncle is in bad health, and he must see the boy before it is too late. You must let me take him up to London, where the family now are, to-morrow. Trust h m with me; he shall come to no harm; remember, though he is my cousin's child, he is also yours; and as such his welfare and his safety are sacred charges for me."

"Oh, I cannot part with him; he is my all!"

"Have I not said that I will guard him as my own life, and bring him safely back to you? Trust me!"

She yielded at length to his earnest entreaty, and consented to his proposal, promising that the boy should be in readiness to accompany him on the following evening.

It was a difficult task that he had set himself, and he was, in his own mind, by no means confident of success. Still, in the boy's interest; for the mother's sake, it must be attempted, good chance or ill.

George was a favourite with his uncle, and when a day or two after, he put the matter before him, the old earl, although not exactly sympathetic, was disposed to do the right thing.

But he made it clear to his nephew that his motives were purely based upon a sense of justice and family honour, and absolutely untinged by sentimentality or mere feeling.

"If Lady Harbleton," he said, "was so foolish as to be deceived by Mervyn's, tongue, I've no pity for her; she must suffer for her folly. The boy, of course, cannot be held to blame, and it is solely because it is his right, that I shall make arrangements at once for his proper education and so on. You may, however, inform Lady Harbleton that a sum of £1,000 per annum will be at her disposal from this date, but that all exp nditure on account of my grandson will be borne by me, and quite exclusive of her allowance. Have you heard from Harbleton lately? I have received nothing from Africa for months."

"No, he must be either ill or wounded. I am going up Pall Mall presently, and will call in at the War Office to see if I can hear anything."

But he was spared the journey.

While putting on his hat and gloves a cablegram was handed to him:

> Captain Lord Harbleton, 2nd Life Guards, succumbed to entoric last night.—BLOEMFONTEIN.

* * * * *

She had heard briefly from him this morning, that he and Mervyn would arrive mid-day; and she was at the door watching the road, which, at the distance of half-a-mile, disappeared round the lower slope of the hill.

He had said no more than that he had news for her. She at once connected this with her little Mervyn's meeting with his grandfather, and what the latter had said and done.

That a cloud had been lifted for her, the cloud of her later life, she did not dream, and that because the memory of a great mistake had worked out its certain and only conclusion.

At last she saw the little dog-cart from the inn turning the hill corner, and the vigorous waving of a handkerchief. Within a few minutes she had her treasure in her arms again.

George stood looking at the picture, and she noticed a brightness, a hopefulness in his eyes that was lacking when they last parted.

She extended her one free hand to him (the other was round her boy) and he ?—he just, without a word, placed the cable message in her hand.

* * * * *

Twelve months afterwards he journeyed again to Ardlene.

His object was but to hear one word from Alice's lips, and, as a faithful chronicler, I am bound to record that word was spoken.

RALPH ENDERBY.

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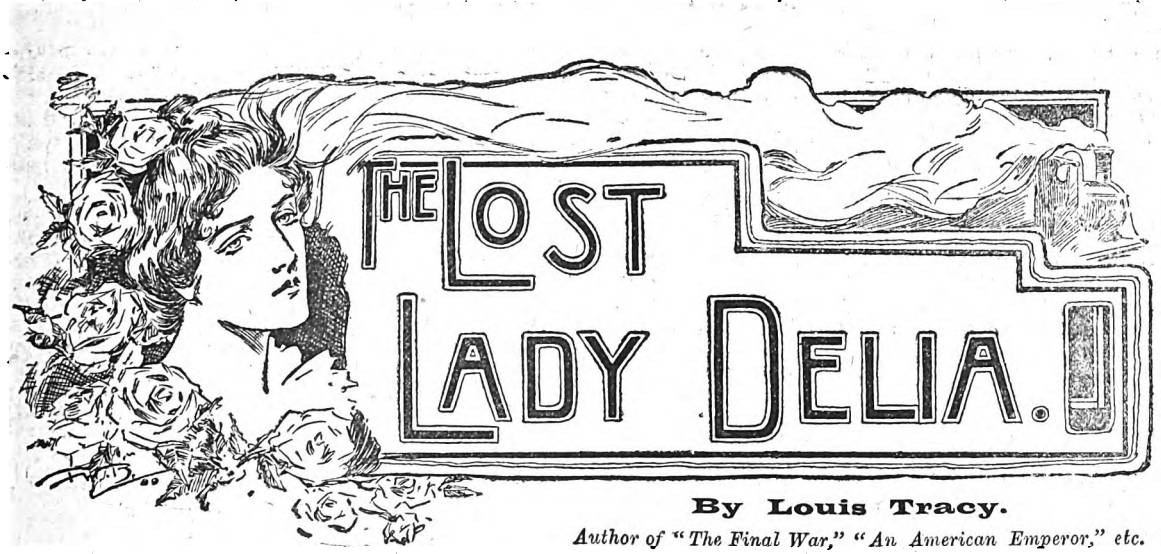

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

THIS TELLS THE STORY FROM THE START.

LADY DELIA LYLE leaves her house one foggy November afternoon saying she is going to see her sister at Richmond, but from that time she is not heard of.

Her husband, Sir Charles Lyle, puts the matter into the hands of detectives, Inspector Winter taking charge of the case.

Reginald Brett, a barrister friend of the Lyles, also promises to do all he can, and he finds out that Lady Delia, on the night of her disappearance, instead of going to Richmond, alighted at Sloane Square, and went to a block of flats called Raleigh Mansions.

Towards the end of the month the body of a woman, evidently murdered, is found wedged beneath a drain-pipe in the Thames at Putney, and, though Sir Charles does not identify the body, Brett imagines it to be that of Lady Delia. Shortly after this discovery Lady Delia's maid, Jane Harding, disappears. She is afterwards found to have gone on the stage.

Brett now starts investigations at Raleigh Mansions, and he fixes on two residents there as being likely to have been connected with Lady Delia. These are a Mr. Sydney H. Pyne, who is not at present in residence, and a Mrs. Hillmer, whom he finds to be Pyne's sister.

It had transpired that Pyne had gone to Monte Carlo, and thither Brett goes, and he discovers that though letters are addressed to Pyne at the Hotel du Cercle he is not known there.

During his stay at Monte Carlo Brett becomes acquainted with an Englishman, named Albert Mensmore, whom he helps out of some money difficulties, but he does not discover anything about Pyne.

After his return Brett finds out that Sir Charles Lyle knows Albert Mensmore, but in what connection does not transpire.

A few days later Brett goes into the City, to the office of Dodge and Co., with whom he had had some speculative dealings, and from remarks made by Mr. Dodge, he thinks that Pyne and Mensmore must be one and the same man. In the evening Brett and Winter go to Raleigh Mansions and search the flat occupied by Pyne. Brett finds that a piece of one of the fire-dogs is missing, and that it exactly corresponds with the piece of iron which was found imbedded in the head of the body found at Putney.

It is shown by this time that Mensmore (who is at Genoa) had previously adopted the name of Pyne. The real Pyne (his mining partner) writes him that their property is likely to bring them much wealth

Pyne arrives in England and takes Mensmore's flat, where the detectives surprise him.

CHAPTER XX. *(continued).*

"I DON'T know what you're talking about, gentlemen," said Pyne, pocketing his revolver; "but it dawns upon me that I shan't be required either to shoot anybody or sleep in gaol to-night."

Winter turned on him fiercely:

"Why didn't you answer my questions properly, and save all this nonsense?"

"I'll tell you why, sir. The name of a friend of mine has been mentioned. Herbert Mensmore has been more than a brother to me. I allowed you meant mischief to him, as you thought you were talking to him all the while. I don't know much about you, but I hope that your first action would not be to give away your chum if he was in trouble."

The detective did not answer, though his look of astonishment at Pyne's declaration of motive was eloquent enough.

"Before we quit this business," went on the American, "Let me say one thing. Any man who tells you that Herbert Mensmore murdered a woman is telling you a lie. I don't know anything about this Lady Delia or how she may have died, but I do know my friend. He's rare good in a tight place, but, to think of him killing a woman—Jehosh, it's sickening."

Mrs. Robinson burst in, with face aflame:

"Is this palaverin' to go on all night?" she demanded angrily. "Here's the dinner spilin', after all me worry and bother, with the head of me vexed to know who is the masther and who isn't."

"All right, mother," laughed Pyne. "Bring in the whole caboodle."

"Mr. Pyne," said Brett, "I hope you will come and have lunch with me to-morrow, at this address," handing him a card. "I want to have a talk with you. Mr. Winter, if you will come with me I will explain a good deal to you of which you are now in ignorance."

"Surely Mr. Pyne will answer a few questions first," said the detective.

"Don't you think you have troubled him sufficiently for this evening? Besides, he can tell us nothing. All the explanation is really due to him, and I propose to give it to him to-morrow. Come, Winter, this time I promise you that a considerable portion of your inquiry shall be cleared up, and I do not speak without foundation as you have often learnt hitherto."

So the mysterious Sydney H. Pyne was left in undisturbed possession of his flat and his dinner, whilst the trio passed out into the quietude of the streets.

CHAPTER XXI.

How LADY DELIA LEFT RALEIGH MANSIONS.

MR. WINTER was actually inclined to preserve silence whilst they walked to Victoria Street. The events of the preceding hour had not exactly conduced to the maintenance, in the eyes of his brother officer, of that pre-eminent sagacity which he invariably claimed.

His companion rubbed in this phase of the matter by saying: "I should think, Jim, you will give Raleigh Mansions a wide berth for some time to come, after making two bad breaks there."

But it was no part of Brett's scheme that Winter should be rendered desperate by repeated failures. "It is not Mr.

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Winter's fault," he said, "that these errors have occurred. They are rather the result of his pertinacity in leaving no clue unsolved which promises to lead to success. When this case ends, if ever it does end, I feel sure he will admit that he has never encountered so much difficulty before in unravelling the most complex problems within his experience."

"That is so," chimed in the senior detective. "The thing that beats me in this affair is the want of a beginning, so to speak. One would imagine it the work of a lunatic if Lady Delia herself had not contributed so curiously to the mystery of her disappearance."

"There you are, Winter; that is the true scent. Find the motive and we find the murderer, if Lady Delia was wilfully put to death."

"If she was, Mr. Brett? Have you any doubt about it?"

"There cannot be certainty when we are groping in the dark. But the gloom is passing; we are on the eve of discovery."

At Brett's residence Winter's colleague left him. Soon the barrister and the policeman were sitting in Brett's sitting-room before a good fire.

There Reggie took him step by step through each branch of his inquiry as it is known to the reader.

He omitted nothing. The discovery of Jane Harding and of Mensmore, the latter's transactions with Dodge and Co., his dramatic *coup* at Monte Carlo and its attendant love episode—all these were exhaustively described. He enlarged upon Mrs. Hillmer's anxiety when the tragedy became known to her, and did not forget Sir Charles Lyle's amazement at the suggestion that his old playmate might prove to be responsible for the death of his wife.

He produced the waxen moulds of the piece of iron found on the body at Putney, and the ornamental scroll from which it had been taken.

At this bit of evidence Mr. Winter's complacency quite forsook him. Thus far he had experienced a feeling of resentment against Brett for having concealed from him so much that was material to their investigation.

But when he realised that a powerful link in the chain of facts had all along been placidly resting before his eyes his distress was evident, and the barrister came to his rescue.

"You are not to blame, Winter," he said, "for having failed to note many things which I have now told you. You are the slave of a system. Your method works admirably for the detection of commonplace crime, but as soon as the higher region of romance is reached it is as much out of place as a steam-roller in a lady's boudoir. Look at the remarkable series of crimes the English police have failed to solve of late, merely because some bizarre element has intruded itself at the outset. Have you ever read any of the works of Edgar Allan Poe?"

The detective answered in the affirmative. He well remembered the murders of the Rue Morgue and the mystery of Marie Rouget.

"Well," went on Brett, "there you have accurate examples of my meaning. Poe would not have been puzzled for an hour by the vagaries of Jack the Ripper. He would have said at once—most certainly after the third or fourth in the series of murders—'This is the work of an athletic lunatic, with a morbid love of anatomy and a morbid hatred for a certain class of women. Look for him amongst young men who have pestered doctors with outrageous theories, and who possess weak-minded or imbecile relatives.' Then, again, take the murder on the South Western Railway. Do you think Poe would have gone about questioning bartenders or inquiring into abortive love affairs? Not he! Jealous swains do not carry pestles about with them to slay their sweethearts, nor do they choose a four-minutes' interval between suburban stations for their frenzied methods of avowing pass on. Here you have the clear trail of a clever lunatic, dropping from the skies, as it were, and disappearing in the same erratic manner. That is why I tell you most emphatically that neither you nor I have yet the remotest conception as to who really killed Lady Delia."

"Surely, Mr. Brett, things look black now against this Mr. Mensmore?"

"Do they? How would it have fared with an acquaintance of one of the unfortunate women killed by the Ripper had the police found him in the locality with fresh bloodstains on his clothes? What would have resulted from the discovery of a chemist's mortar among the possessions of one of Elizabeth Camp's male friends? Come, now, be honest, and tell me."

But Mr. Winter could only smoke in silence.

"Therefore," continued Brett, "let us ask ourselves why, and how, it was possible for Mensmore to commit this crime. Personally, notwithstanding all that we apparently know against him circumstantially, I should hardly believe Mensmore if he confessed himself to be the murderer!"

"Now, why on earth do you say that, Mr. Brett?"

"Because Mensmore is normal and this crime abnormal. Because the man who would blow out his brains on account of losses at pigeon-shooting never had brains enough to dispose of the body in such fashion. Because Mensmore, having temporarily changed his name for some trivial reason, would never resume it with equal triviality with this shadow upon his life?"

"Then why have you told me all these things that tell so heavily against him?"

"In order that, this time at least, you may feel that the production of a pair of handcuffs does not satisfactorily settle the entire business."

"I promise you there shall be no more arrests until this affair is much more decided than it is at present."

"Good. I shall make a detective of you after my own heart in time."

"Yet I cannot help being surprised, Mr. Brett, at the very strange fact that his own sister should seem to suspect him!"

"Ah. Now you have struck the true line. Why did she have that fear? There I am with you entirely. Let us ascertain that and I promise you an important development. Mrs. Hillmer and Mensmore are both concerned in the disappearance of Lady Delia, yet neither knew that she had disappeared, and both are deeply upset by it, for Mrs. Hillmer flies off to warn her brother, and the brother posts back to London the moment it comes to his ears through her. There, you see, we have a key which may unlock many doors. For Heaven's sake let it not be battered out of shape the instant it reaches our hands."

But Mr. Winter was quite humble. "As I have told you, Mr. Brett," he said, "I have done with the battering process."

"I am sure of it. And now listen to the most remarkable fact that has yet come to light. Lady Delia's body was taken from Raleigh Mansions to Putney in a four-wheeler. The cabman was forthwith locked up by the police and clapped into prison for three months. He was released yesterday, and will be here within the next quarter of an hour."

The detective's hair nearly rose on end at this statement, "Look here, Mr. Brett!" he cried, "have you any more startlers up your sleeve, or is that the finish?"

"That is the last shot in my locker."

"I'm jolly glad! I half-expected that the next thing you would say was that you did the job yourself!"

"It wouldn't be the first time you thought that; eh, my friend?"

Winter positively blushed. "Oh! that's chaff," he said. "But why the dickens did the police lock up this cabman—the only witness we could lay our hands upon? Why, I myself questioned every cabman in the vicinity several times."

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"Because he got drunk on the proceeds of the journey, and subsequently thought he was Phaeton driving the chariot of the sun. But, there, he will tell you himself. I met him yesterday morning outside Holloway Gaol, and persuaded him to come here to-night, provided that he has not gone on the spree again with disastrous results."

The entrance of Smith—obviously relieved to see his master and the "'tec" on such good terms—to announce the arrival of "Mr. William Marsh," settled any doubts as to the cabman's intentions, and his appearance established the fact of his sobriety. Three months "hard" had made the cab-driver a new man.

Recognition was mutual between him and Mr. Winter.

"Hallo, Foxey," cried the latter. "It's you, is it?"

"Me it is, guv'nor; but I didn't know there was to be a 'cop' here." This with a suspicious glance at Brett and a backward movement towards the door.

"Do not be alarmed," said Brett. "This gentleman's presence means no harm to you. We want you to help us, and if you do so willingly I will make up that lost fiver you got for driving two people to Putney the night you were arrested."

The poor old cabman became very confused at this staggering remark. Up to that moment he regarded Brett as the agent for a charitable association, and there was no harm, he told his "missus," in trying to "knock him for a bit."

He stood nervously fumbling with his hat, but did not answer. Winter knew how to deal with him.

"Sit down, Foxey, and have a drink. You need one to cheer you up. Answer this gentleman's questions. He means you no harm."

"Honour bright?"

"Honour bright!"

"Well, I don't mind if I do. No soda, thank you, sir. Just a small drop of water. Ah, that's better stuff 'n they keep in Holloway."

Thus fortified, Marsh had no hesitation in telling them what he knew. Substantially, his story was identical with the version given to Brett by the ticket-collector.

"Can you describe the gentleman?" said Brett.

"No, sir. He was just like any other swell. Tall and well-dressed, and talked in the haw-haw style. It might ha' been yerself for all I could tell."

Brett smiled.

"Do you think it was I?"

Foxey scratched his head.

"No, p'r'aps it wasn't, now I come to rec'llect. He 'ad a moustache, and you 'aven't. Beggin' yer pardon, sir, but you 'ave a bit of the cut of a parson or a hactor, an' this chap wasn't neither—just an everyday sort of toff."

"Could you swear to him if you saw him?"

"That I couldn't, sir. I am a rare 'and at langwidge, but I couldn't manage that."

"Why?"

"Because that night, sir, I were as full as a tick when I started. Lord love you, it must 'ave poured out of me afterwards when I started fightin' coppers. Mr. Winter, 'e knows, I ain't no fightin' man as a rule."

"And the lady? Did you see her?"

"No, sir. Leastways, I seed a bundle which I took to be a lady, but her face was covered up with a shawl, and she was lyin' 'eavy in 'is arms as though she was mortal bad. He tell'd me she was sick."

"Did he? Anything else?"

"No, sir."

"Are you sure it was a shawl?"

A vacuous smile spread over Foxey's countenance as he answered: "I ain't sure of anythink that 'appened that night."

"But were you not surprised when a man took your cab under such peculiar circumstances, and paid you such a high fare?"

"We four-wheelers are surprised at nothink, sir. You

KING PHILIP AND OTHERS.

"King Philip," says a Spanish historian, "was liable to die any day from one of the violent attacks of indigestion and biliousness to which he was subject."

Well, if he had died nobody would have cried; yet better men than he was have died by myriads of the same complaint. Yes, and men who were a loss to their fellows too.

"With great and high folks," said Douglas Jerrold, "whenever a sickness shows itself in a family, it is treated with so much pomp and ceremony it can't make up its mind to leave."

Perhaps so; yet those of us who have a living to earn always want the sickness to leave just as soon as we can coax it or compel it to go.

On this very matter of biliousness it is Mrs. Sarah Binks who says:—"For fifteen years I have been liable to bilious attacks and had to be very careful about my eating.

"If I catch cold or get run down a bit I am almost sure—or used to be sure—to be bilious and sometimes very sick.

"I can always tell when one of these spells is coming on; my tongue gets furry and tastes nasty, and I feel good for nothing.

"Only those who are bothered with a sluggish liver know how miserable and wretched an attack of this kind makes one feel."

(Exactly. It is, as Prior says, "the solid stroke of the stomach and the liver that tells us what's o'clock." When they go wrong! Ah!)

"But," continues Mrs. Binks, "no matter how bad I feel one dose of Mother Seigel's Syrup always puts me right,—especially if I am able to sit down quietly for an hour after I have taken it.

"The Syrup settles my stomach and not only makes me hungry but helps me digest whatever I eat. It seems to get right whatsoever is wrong inside and then I feel fit and well again.

"I have often given a dose of Seigel's Syrup to girls suffering from sick headache and it has never failed to relieve them.

"Whatever else comes and goes there is one thing I keep in the house all the time—a bottle of Seigel's Syrup." Sarah Binks, 14 Lennox Street, Kirkstall Road, Leeds, February 23rd, 1900.

Mr. George Smith is a grocer and carrier, and lives at Garton, near Driffield, Yorks. He is constitutionally troubled with wind or gas, from indigestion. The only thing, he says, that does him any good is Seigel's Syrup. With care in his diet it will soon make him a young man at sixty.

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don't know all wot goes on in kebs. Why, once crossin' Waterloo Bridge——"

"Never mind Waterloo Bridge, Foxey," put in the detective. "Keep all your wits on as much as you can remember of November 6."

"Where did he tell you to drive to?" went on Brett.

"Just Putney. I was to drive my hardest. 'I rec'llect wantin' to pull up at the Three Bells, but 'e put 'is 'ead out an' said, 'Go on, driver. I'm awfully late already.' So on I went."

"Where did you stop?"

"I don't know no more than the child unborn. By that time the drink was yeastin' up in me. The fare kept me on the road 'e wanted by shoutin'. When we pulled up, 'e carries 'er into a lane. There was a big house there. I know that all right. After a bit 'e comes back an' tips me a fiver. With that I whips up the old 'oss and gets back to the Three Bells. You know the rest, as the girl said when she axed the Bench to——"

"Yes, we know the rest," interrupted Brett, "but I fear you are not able to help us much."

"This isn't a five-pun job, eh, guv'nor?" said Foxey anxiously.

"Hardly, at present. We shall see. Can you say exactly where you drew up your cab when the lady was carried into it?"

"Sure as death," replied the cabman, in the hope that his information might yet be valuable. "It was outside Raleigh Mansions, Sloane Square."

"We know that——"

"It seems to me, sir, as ye know as much about the business as I do," broke in Marsh.

"Were you in the Square or in Sloane Street?"

"In Sloane Street, of course. Right away from the Square."

"Not so very far away, surely?"

Foxey was doubtful. His memory was hazy, and he feared lest he should be mistaken. "No, no," he said quickly, "not far, but still well in the street."

"Were there many people about?"

"You could hardly tell, sir, it was that foggy and nasty. If the lydy 'ad bin dead nobody would have noticed her that night."

"Did anyone beside yourself see the gentleman carrying the lady into the cab?"

"I think not. I don't remember anybody passin' at the time."

"Did the gentleman keep your cab waiting long at the kerb before he brought the lady out?"

"It might ha' bin a minute or two."

"No longer?"

"Well, sir, it's 'ard for me to say, especially after bein' away for a change of 'ealth, so to speak."

"Did not the lady speak or move in any manner?"

"Not so far as I know, sir."

"And do you mean to tell me that, although you had been drinking, you were not astonished at the whole business?"

"I never axes my fares any questions 'cept when they say 'By the hour'. Then I wants to know a bit."

"Yes; but this carrying of a lady out of a house in such a fashion—did not this strike you as strange?"

"Strange, bless your 'eart, sir. You ought to see me carting 'em off from the Daffodil Club after a big night—three and four in one keb, all blind, paralytic."

"No doubt; but this is not the Daffodil Club at daybreak. It was a respectable neighbourhood at seven o'clock, or thereabouts, on a winter's evening."

"It ain't my fault," said Foxey doggedly. "What was wrong with the lydy? Was it a habduction?"

"The lady was dead—murdered, we believe."

The cabman's face grew livid with anxiety.

"Oh, crikey, Mr. Winter," he cried, addressing the detective, "I knew nothink about it."

"No one says you did, Foxey," was the reply. "Don't you get frightened. We just want you to help us as far as you can, and not to get skeered and lose your wits."

Thus reassured, Marsh mopped his head and said solemnly:

"I will do wot lies in my power, gentlemen both, but I wish I 'adn't bin so blamed drunk that night."

"You say you would not recognise your fare if you saw him," continued Brett. "Could you tell us, if you were shown a certain person, that he was *not* the man. You might not be sure of the right man, but you might be sure regarding the wrong one."

"Yes, sir. It wasn't you, and it wasn't Mr. Winter, and it wasn't a lot of other people I know. I think if I saw the man who really got into my keb, I would be able to swear that he was like him, at any rate."

"All right. That will do for the present. Leave us your address, so that we may find you again if necessary. Here is a sovereign for you."

When Marsh had left them, Brett turned to the detective.

"Well," he said, "if Mensmore were here now, I suppose you would want to lock him up."

"No," said Winter, "the more I learn about this affair the more mixed it becomes. Still, I don't deny but I shall be glad to have Mensmore's explanation of his movements at that time. And so will you, Mr. Brett."

CHAPTER XXII.

A Wilful Murder.

Brett sent a telegram to Mrs. Hillmer at Paris. "Matters satisfactorily arranged pending your arrival," he wired, and early on Monday morning he received a reply.

"Due Charing Cross 7.30 p.m. Will drive straight to your chambers with my brother.—Gwendoline Hillmer."

He forwarded the message with a note to Mr. Winter, asking him to be present.

About one o'clock Pyne turned up.

"Guess I slept well last night after the excitement," he said with a pleasant smile. "You seemed to skeer those chaps more with a few words, Mr. Brett, than I did with a revolver."

"The English police are not so much afraid of revolvers as they are of making mistakes," was the answer.

"Now, is that so? On our side they wouldn't have stopped to argy. Both of 'em would have drawn on me at once."

"Then I am glad for everybody's sake, Mr. Pyne, that the affair happened in London."

"Why, sure. But tell me. Has my friend Mensmore been getting himself into trouble?"

"Not so much as it looks. Others appear to have involved him without his knowledge, and he has lent colour to the accusations by his involuntary actions of a suspicious nature."

"Well, if it is permissible, I should like to hear the straight story."

Under the circumstances Brett felt that this stranger from America had a right to know why he was in such danger of being arrested during his first twenty-four hours' residence in the country, so he gave him a succinct narrative of the *prima facie* case against Mensmore.

Pyne listened in silence to the recital. When it ended he said:

"Mr. Brett, my friend was incapable of murdering any woman. He was equally incapable of conducting any discreditable liaison with any woman. I have known him for years, and a straighter, truer, more honourable man I never met. I don't know what his reason was for assuming my name, which he undoubtedly did, as the agent called this morning, and I find the flat is taken in my name."

"What did you say?"

(To be continued.)

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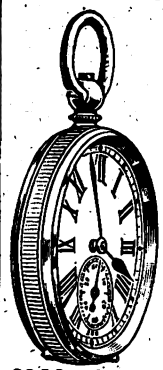

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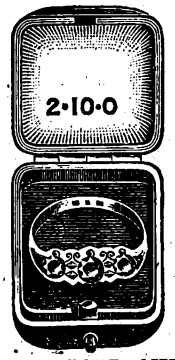

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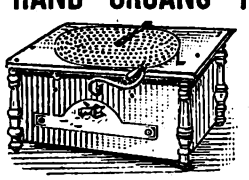

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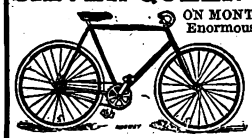

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

LAST week I announced briefly that I had several new features in contemplation for *Short Stories*. I should like to say a word or two about them here.

In the first place, I have been fortunate enough to secure for exclusive publication in this country a series of stories by Mr. R. Norman Silver, whose last novel, "A Daughter of Mystery," was recently followed day by day by eager hundreds of thousands in the *Daily Express*.

The tales which Mr. Norman Silver has written for *Short Stories* will appear under the general title of

"A Keeper of Secrets,"

and will deal with incidents in the life of the late Mr. Hugo Pontifex, the famous West-end solicitor.

These stories, which will begin next week, will be complete in each number, and will be found to be of a most engrossing nature. Indeed, in my humble opinion, the doings of Hugo Pontifex will seize the popular mind with a hold as tenacious as did the characters of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Nikola. The character, indeed, although a quite distinct type from those famous creations of the novelists, has all the intense, almost uncanny, fascination which they possessed. Dramatic and romantic enough to suit the most exacting reader, the stories have the added merit of being founded on fact.

Here is the author's foreword regarding Hugo Pontifex, which will give the reader some inkling of the kind of stories he may expect:

A KEEPER OF SECRETS.

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To those who had only met him casually in Society, the late Mr. Pontifex was a good-tempered mystery. Bluff, handsome, and in spite of his middle-age, a little of a dandy, he seemed the last man in the world to deserve his reputation, which was that of the keenest, most audacious, and unerring of family lawyers. Fair-haired, and powerful as an athlete, his striking appearance was increased by his eyes, one of which was grey and one blue.

In reality, however, Hugo Pontifex had a wide and almost exclusively aristocratic practice. He seldom briefed a barrister, seldom set foot in a court of justice, but single handed he hunted down, captured and safely buried, mystery after mystery of terrible import to Ma fair and Belgravia.

An expert in strangling scandal, he lived a life of enthralling interest and died a rich man. When his executors went through his papers they found nothing to satisfy their curiosity, though plenty to excite it. Hugo Pontifex knew the value of fire—and the dangers of ink. But from time to time he related to the writer, who enjoyed a certain measure of his confidence, the incidents which form the basis of the following stories. In speaking of these strange fragments of drama, Mr. Pontifex himself employed fictitious names, the present author being left to guess vainly at the identity of the genuine actors.

Another series of stories which is bound to prove popular will be "Tales Told Off Duty."

These will be told by various people, and will comprise stories by soldiers, sailors, detectives, prison-warders, doctors, divers, firemen; indeed, every kind of person into whose lives there enters a large element of adventure and excitement.

As with the other series, so will these tales be complete in each number.

And now I wish to seize what seems to me a fitting opportunity to make a request to you. I want you to help *Short Stories* by securing new readers. Widely known as the paper is, there are still some people who do not read it with that regularity which I should desire. It is within your power to help me in this connection, and I shall feel much obliged if you will do so by bringing the paper under the notice of your brother or sister, or somebody else's brother or sister. One of the chief charms of *Short Stories* is that it appeals equally to both sexes. I am sure I can rely on your doing your best.

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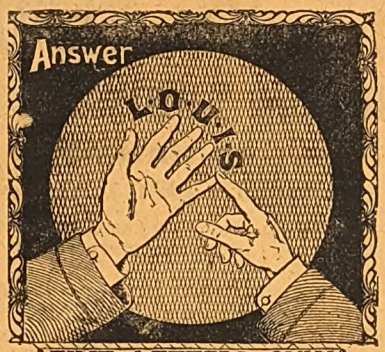

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A Keeper of Secrets

Being Days in the Professional Life of the late Mr. Hugo Pontifex, the Famous West-end Solicitor.

To those who had only met him casually in Society, the late Mr. Pontifex was a good-tempered mystery. Buff, handsome, and, in spite of his middle-age, a little of a dandy, he seemed the last man in the world to deserve his reputation, which was that of the keenest, most audacious, and unerring of family lawyers. Fair-haired, and powerful as an athlete, his striking appearance was increased by his eyes, one of which was grey and one blue.

In reality, however, Hugo Pontifex had a wide and almost exclusively aristocratic practice. He seldom briefed a barrister, seldom set foot in a court of justice, but single handed he hunted down, captured, and safely buried mystery after mystery of terrible import to Mayfair and Belgravia.

An expert in st. angling scandal, he lived a life of enthralling interest, and died a rich man. When his executors went through his papers they found nothing to satisfy their curiosity, though plenty to excite it. Hugo Pontifex knew the value of fire—and the dangers of ink. But from time to time he related to the writer, who enjoyed a certain measure of his confidence, the incidents which form the basis of the following stories. In speaking of these strange fragments of drama, Mr. Pontifex himself employed fictitious names, the present author being left to guess vainly at the identity of the genuine actors.

I.—THE FATE OF THE BANTRY PEERAGE.

"THE Marquis of Bantry, sir."

Mr. Pontifex's clerk—a tall man in rusty black, with the stoop of a clergyman and the voice of a butler—announced the great solicitor's latest client and then squeezed himself respectfully against the massive door of the private room as the Marquis passed in. He drew it to and latched it before regaining his seat at a desk which practically guarded the approach to Mr. Pontifex's sanctum.

The clerk himself was rather deaf and made both a safe and determined sentry. Not that anything less than a scream or a pistol-shot could have penetrated to the outer world through the stout walls and door of Mr. Pontifex's apartment.

The solicitor had risen to meet his visitor. The card sent in by the Marquis lay on the writing-table; he had just put down a swan quill in a gold and cornelian holder.

The Marquis of Bantry took in at a glance the solid yet tasteful luxury of the room, the rare old steel prints in their handsome frames, the Afghan carpet, the antique oak furniture. He noticed the easy self-possession of the lawyer's bearing, the elegance of his dress, the value and beauty of his jewellery. When, therefore, an instant later, the peer bowed to the solicitor, it was not the salutation of a superior to an inferior, but the bow of one gentleman to another.

"Mr. Pontifex," he said, accepting the seat which the lawyer suggested with a smile and a silent gesture, "I come upon a singular errand."

"Most of my clients, Lord Bantry," observed Mr. Pontifex, reassuringly, "have the same confession to make."

"So I understood," answered the Marquis, "indeed, that is why I am here—attracted, if I may say so, by your remarkable reputation. You are doubtless a busy man, Mr. Pontifex, and I will come to the point at once. You may have heard that my daughter, Lady Julia Ennis, is to be married shortly to Mr. Cecil Stratton, the son of Mr. Lucas Stratton, who will be known to you in connection with the Stock Exchange."

"The wedding is expected to prove one of the most brilliant of the season," rejoined the solicitor, courteously. He was studying the grey-headed soldierly figure before him.

The marriage to which the Marquis had referred was furnishing materials for endless gossip in smart circles. Lord Bantry was an Irish peer, who, as a youth, had inherited a splendid title and a wrecked fortune. Now, in his old age, he was stooping to ally his blue blood with the gold of a mushroom millionaire. He acknowledged Mr. Pontifex's compliment with a sigh.

"Julia is young, pretty, and really in love," he said gloomily, "and Cecil Stratton is a good fellow who worships the ground she walks on. But it is necessary for me to confess to you, Mr. Pontifex, that his father has only

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consented to the marriage because he believes that Julia will, one of these days, be a peeress in her own right, with remainder to her children. My daughter was to become the wife of Cecil Stratton in virtue of her position as the last of the Ennises, her husband was to take the name of Stratton-Ennis, and the Stratton millions were to restore prosperity to the house of Bantry."

Mr. Pontifex chose a small revolver and pocketed it.

"Pardon my observing, Lord Bantry," interposed the solicitor; "that you speak in the past tense. Am I to conclude that some obstacle to the marriage has arisen or may arise?"

The Marquis leant towards his questioner. "You have guessed rightly," he replied, in a low tone; "whether you can help me or not remains to be seen. Yet it is in that hope I have sought you."

Mr. Pontifex played with his ring—a ring that mounted a superb emerald. He did not speak—it was his habit to wait for confidences.

"Most people have forgotten by now," went on Lord Bantry; "that I had once two sons, Valentine, Viscount Athlone, and Stephen his younger brother. The Ennis blood ran in their veins, they were both wild—as wild as their great-grandfather, the Black Marquis of the Georges. Their passion was hunting—hunting and steeple-chasing. Valentine was just past his majority, Stephen nearing it, when, in a steeple-chase in which both were riding, their horses collided at a bad wall-jump and came down together. Stephen was picked up dead and frightfully crushed."

The Marquis faltered and turned his face away. Mr. Pontifex was watching him closely.

"Soon afterwards," murmured Lord Bantry, "Athlone left Ireland for the East. He ceased to communicate with us, drawing his allowance through an agent in Cairo, and leading a wandering, adventurous, misanthropic existence. Ultimately we heard of his death. That was the way in which Julia became the heiress of Bantry."

As the Marquis described the fate of his elder son his tone grew hard and dry—there had been grief in it when he mentioned the death of his younger one.

"A melancholy story, Lord Bantry," said Mr. Pontifex; "but why recall it now?"

The Marquis of Bantry looked furtively about the quiet private room, into which the chill February noon sent a pale and unusual gleam of sunshine. Then he whispered slowly:

"It was a mistake about Athlone—a ghastly mistake; he still lives, lives! Oh, the horror of it! the horror of it!"

A flicker of shrewd interest shot across the solicitor's countenance.

"My dear Lord Bantry," he expostulated, gravely; "the Viscount is your own son. Even if his return to life should interfere with your plans for Lady Julia, you will find a welcome for him when the first shock of your—your surprise is past."

The Marquis stared at the lawyer with a strange incredulity.

"Find a welcome for Athlone!" he muttered; "you don't understand—can't you see the accident at the wall-jump was no accident at all—Stephen was murdered! murdered! and by his own brother! The whole county suspected it, Athlone had backed his horse desperately and it was first favourite. Stephen rode a weedy chestnut he had trained himself and the brute had a marvellous turn of speed. At the wall the chestnut was going easy, with everyone but Athlone beaten and distanced, and it was plain that even Athlone's horse had made his last challenge. It was then that Athlone, who was the better rider, fouled the chestnut and brought

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his own horse and himself on top of Stephen. You would say he did it in a sudden fury and repented it in sackcloth and ashes. So said I, once."

He twisted his silk handkerchief into a knot and wiped his trembling lips.

"I pitied Athlone," he said, sternly, "for I thought it was my hot temper coming out in the lad and ruining his life for ever. So I sent him abroad—for all the county cut him after that—and I starved the estate to make him an allowance. Then my Julia fell sick—she had ailed since Stephen's death—and in her delirium she betrayed the awful truth, for it had preyed on her mind long and sore."

Mr. Pontifex was certainly interested in this, nor did he take the trouble to disguise the fact. He had thrown one foot over his knee and sat with his arms folded and his brows knitted. His peculiar eyes glittered as they only did when he was, in his cold fashion, a trifle excited.

"It was no mad fury that led Athlone to kill his brother," said the Marquis, with a harsh directness that forbade sympathy; "he had sworn to do it if the chestnut was ridden in the Bantry Steeplechase. They had tried horses together and Stephen won with a stone in hand. Athlone asked him to withdraw from the race and was refused. Julia heard them quarrelling over it.

"'Very well,' Athlone told his brother, 'as sure as you ride in that race it will be your last. I'll kill you at the wall, if I do for myself into the bargain.' And he did it, as he had sworn, and earnt the curse of the father he had bereaved and dishonoured."

Lord Bantry wiped his forehead—it was dripping with perspiration.

"When I knew of it," he added, "I wrote and forbade him ever to see me again. For Julia's sake I did not tell him how I had become cognisant of his guilt, but I stopped his allowance and warned him he was as dead to me henceforth as he had made Stephen. After that I heard no more of him until there came the news, apparently accurate, of his death. And now, now he has come back—to England, to London, a miserable, broken wretch. All other sources of income have failed him, and, a criminal apparently in more lands than one, he demands money from me with menaces, threatening to ruin Julia's marriage if I refuse it."

The Marquis scanned eagerly the solicitor's expression, but not yet did Mr. Pontifex choose to indulge in any comment.

"How can I deny his demands," pursued Lord Bantry, "without shattering my last hope of restoring the Bantry fortunes, how can I in honour—even if I could bribe Athlone to silence—permit the marriage to take place under false pretences? Answer me these riddles, Mr. Pontifex, and I will give you, in three months, a blank cheque which you shall fill in as you will."

The solicitor twisted the emerald ring upon his long, firm finger—round and round it went—then stopped suddenly. Mr. Pontifex had made up his mind.

"Let me know," he said, "where I can see your son."

Lord Bantry coloured deeply.

At the sound of the solicitor's footsteps, the figure got up.

"Athlone writes," was the peer's embarrassed reply; "that he is masquerading as an Indian attendant seeking an engagement. He gives an address in Soho and insisted that I should bring or send him money. Alarmed by his threats, I yielded, and made an appointment. Had it not been for hearing your name and remarkable abilities mentioned at my club, I should have been on my way to Soho by this."

"With your permission," said Mr. Pontifex, "I will

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keep that appointment for you, Lord Bantry. May I know the address?"

"The top floor at Number Five, ——— Street, Soho," explained the Marquis; "ask, he says, for Muley Hassan."

Mr. Pontifex rose and the peer followed his example, taking up his silk hat from the lawyer's writing-table.

"One moment!" desired the solicitor; he paused himself, gazing intently at the Marquis. "You have no thought in this matter but for your daughter, Lady Julia?" he inquired; "you believed that Viscount Athlone was dead—your one wish is that he had not returned to life?"

Lord Bantry shivered as he encountered the piercing scrutiny of the solicitor. But he stiffened himself coldly and declared:

"I have already said so—could I endure a fratricide to become Marquis of Bantry? If I had no daughter, sir, I should still wish that Athlone were dead."

Mr. Pontifex bent his head as if he had received the answer to some important question. His clerk entered, to stand inquiringly on the threshold.

"The Marquis' carriage," said the solicitor, and bowed to his client. "You have given me a difficult task, Lord Bantry," he observed; "in twenty-four hours you shall know if I have been able to help you."

The Marquis returned the salute with an old-world courtesy and passed out of the apartment. As for Mr. Pontifex, he stepped to a cupboard, took from it a dark overcoat, by no means smartly made, selected a felt hat from the half-dozen which hung in the species of closet, pushed off his patent-leather boots and donned a rougher pair.

As a last feature in his toilet he laid aside his rings and pin, locking them up in his private safe. From among several such articles in this receptacle, he chose a small and extremely plain revolver, loaded, and pocketed it. Then, unfastening a second door to the apartment, he slipped out into a gloomy corridor that reached a bye-way of St. James Street. These unceremonious disappearances were familiar to Mr. Pontifex's clerk, who was, in fact, as discreet as he was deaf.

Mr. Pontifex walked up St. James Street and strolled into Soho by way of Golden Square. He found ——— Street without trouble and made for Number Five.

It was an old and much-battered house of three stories, whose panelled door stood wide open, showing a carpetless lobby and rickety stairs.

The solicitor marched in and was investigating the entrances on the loftiest landing before anyone could have noticed his presence in the neighbourhood of Number Five.

Two out of the three entrances were bolted or otherwise secured.

From the other, which stood ajar, came certain sickly fumes that caused Mr. Pontifex to shrug his shoulders. They were those of stale opium smoke. He thrust the door inward and passed through.

On a mattress that occupied a corner of the garret lay outstretched a thin and wasted figure, clad in the limp black garments peculiar to the Indian servant in England. On its head was a cotton turban. The skin of the face was sallow and had doubtless been dyed.

The miserable wretch clung to the knees of Mr. Pontifex.

At the sound of the solicitor's footstep the figure got up.

Although the place reeked of opium and there were the instruments for smoking it on a splintered box that served as table, the occupant was not under the influence of the drug.

"Well," Mr. Pontifex was told, "I suppose you're from my lord of B. No one comes here in a month of Sundays, except on business. Now you've arrived, cut the cackle and get to the horses. What are the terms? I warn you the old man will have to stump up something handsome if he doesn't want me to cook his goose about

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Julia and Stratton. Peeress in her own right—ha-! ha!" And the figure on the mattress shook with painful laughter.

Mr. Pontifex answered with studied calmness but actual anxiety. He was about to stake his whole game on the issue of a single throw.

"I have not come to offer terms," he replied, "the Marquis is a man of honour and a law-abiding citizen. It is not easy to blackmail such a man. As his solicitor I am instructed to inform you of his decision and to prepare you for the worst. In a few moments you will be arrested and charged with the wilful murder of your brother, Lord Stephen Ennis, on the Bantry racecourse, by deliberately fouling him at an obstacle while riding in a steeplechase."

The sham native sprang up—he had turned white under his dye and his limbs were shaking.

"You are mad!" he whispered, fiercely, "mad! My father daren't do it—I tell you he daren't."

The solicitor turned away, as if indifferent to this outburst.

"He can, and will," was his retort, "or, rather I will for him. Men who take my advice, adopt a short way with such as you, Viscount Athlone, the police are already informed of your whereabouts and the nature of your crime."

Pontifex held his breath as he watched the effect of this announcement—with one hand in his pocket he was fingering the little revolver. The disguised viscount fell back in a state of shuddering collapse.

"It's a lie!" he muttered brokenly. "a lie. Stephen died by accident—it was brought in at the inquest."

"Yours is the lie," said Mr. Pontifex, mercilessly; "you swore to kill your brother at the wall-jump if he rode the chestnut. Premeditation is wilful murder all the world over."

A paralysing terror had seized upon Valentine, Viscount Athlone. But he strove desperately to maintain a defiant front.

"What—what evidence," he gasped, "has been trumped up in support of this fantastic charge?"

"None has been invented," responded the solicitor, still trifling with the revolver in his pocket, "because there was no need. Your words were, 'As sure as you ride in that race it will be your last—I will kill you at the wall, if I do for myself into the bargain.' Those words fell upon the ear of your sister Julia."

A peculiar cry, like the yelp of a shot rabbit, burst from the lips of the figure on the mattress. Mr. Pontifex stooped over it, whispering sentence after sentence of determined brutality.

"You are a dead man, Valentine Ennis," he said; "your life is forfeit to the gallows, and your sister Julia, rather than incur her father's curse, will place the rope about your neck. It would have been well for you and yours if you had died abroad—anywhere, anyhow, save by the white cap and the noose. But Justice must be done upon you to the utmost, for all your blue blood, fratricide that you are. You had better go quietly with the police whom I am about to summon."

The miserable wretch that had once been the dashing Viscount Athlone dragged himself up and clung to the knees of Mr. Pontifex.

"Don't let them take me," he wailed; "save me from that—it's all true. I did swear to Stephen to kill him if he didn't withdraw the chestnut, I did ride him down at the wall and put my horse on top of him. But don't let them hang me, anything but that! If only for the sake of my sister Julia; anything but that!"

As he grasped the solicitor's knees imploringly, Mr. Pontifex slipped the revolver from his pocket, shielding it ostentatiously in the palm of his hand.

The Viscount's eye caught it and he threw himself upon it, wrenching it from the fingers that held it, and concealing it instantly. Yet he flung at Mr. Pontifex such a look of imaginary comprehension and gratitude that the stern heart of the solicitor sickened for a moment at the part he was playing.

"You have five minutes," he said significantly, and with that crept away down the uneven stairs.

In the lobby below he halted—he himself was trembling, somewhere in the recesses of his iron frame. What seemed an eternity stole by, and then came a curious and distant sound, faint and crisp, like the crack of a whip-lash on a frosty morning or the noise of a cork drawn in a large hall.

For a second Mr. Pontifex closed his eyes; when he opened them his face bore its usual cool expression. He walked out into the street and passed southwards across Soho.

Mr. Pontifex re-entered his private room by the door at the back, which was reached by a gloomy corridor from a bye-street. He hung up his outer garments, and resumed his rings and pin.

Afterwards, as he had some unimportant business letters to write, Mr. Pontifex began to write them.

* * * * *

At noon the following day the Marquis of Bantry called at the office of Hugo Pontifex.

The solicitor greeted him impassively and handed him an early edition of an evening paper.

Mr. Pontifex's thumb was on a small paragraph, it was headed:

STRANGE SUICIDE!

A man was found dead last evening in a room in —— Street. He was known in the neighbourhood as Muley Hassan, and was supposed to be an Indian servant out of employment. He had committed suicide by shooting himself with a miniature revolver, which he still clutched tightly. The doctor who examined the body says that it is that of a European, the face and arms having been dyed yellow as a sort of disguise. He was believed to be in extremely poor circumstances, and doubtless this was the reason for the rash act.

The Marquis raised himself sternly to his full height. It seemed as if a great weight had been rolled from his shoulders.

"Fortune, I see, still watches over the house of Bantry," he said, with an attempt at cheerfulness, "I regret I troubled you to no purpose, Mr. Pontifex."

The solicitor frowned, almost imperceptibly.

"No one ever does that, Lord Bantry," he answered, "I persuaded your son that you had placed the matter in the hands of the police—that they were, in fact, at his very door. But be reassured, I will not include in my bill—the cost of a 'miniature revolver.'"

The Marquis of Bantry shrank from Hugo Pontifex.

"They told me truly," he murmured; "when they said that you had never failed a client yet. But you are a strange man, Mr. Pontifex, a strange and terrible man. Nevertheless, I am greatly your debtor."

"Quite so," replied Mr. Pontifex, drily, for he had noticed the Marquis's involuntary shudder, "but I think I acted as much in the Viscount's interest as yours. He was, I discovered, an inveterate opium-smoker. As it happens, I once saw the death of an opium-maniac. If I tricked your son, it was into a less painful end than Nature had in store for him."

And, with characteristic curtness, he rang the bell for the peer to be shown out.

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Algy Lennon's Promotion.

By Edna S. Gamble.

Go to your work and be strong, halting not in your ways –
Baulking the end—half-won—for an instant dole of praise.
—KIPLING.

"It's no fault of Algy's that he's a bit of a duke—fellows can't help these things, they're born so; but where Algy shows his sense is that he keeps it in the background—doesn't let it worry him you know, sir, and that's why he's such a favourite on the *Pegasus*."

The R.M.S. *Pegasus*, laden with mails, frozen mutton, and some two hundred odd passengers, ploughed her way up North from Sydney.

She had called at Brisbane for the Queensland mails that morning, and now, some few hours later, she steamed on in the teeth of a stiff breeze that had "slewed round from Southerly to the Eastward out of pure cussedness."

At least that was how the slangy and somewhat cheeky young Third explained matters, as he tied his long legs into a knot, and prepared to make himself entertaining to one of the most interesting passengers so far, of the trip.

Ex-Admiral Copley was on his way home by the Western Route and the Canadian and Pacific Railway.

After the manner of the man retired from the services, he was inclined to be reserved and taciturn. He had a characteristic way with him too of setting his mind in true British bull-dog fashion on a thing, and "seeing it through."

Just now, the object of his interest was the Second of the *Pegasus*, in whose interests he was allowing himself to be talked to in a fatherly sort of way by the irrepressible Third, Tony Harrowby, a young Australian but newly joined, and with all the free and easy dash of his undisciplined nation.

It was that dog-tired time of day on ship board, the interval between lunch and afternoon tea, and the object of their special attention kept his middle watch on the bridge.

Algy Lennon was a universal favourite. Of a medium height, well knit, with the true blue eyes of the sailor, the fresh, cold tub English complexion on his clean-shaven face, and that quiet air of assurance in manner and movement that is the mark of his class, Algy Lennon was a man to attract the most casual observer.

"Um!" muttered the Admiral, as he looked up at the calmly immovable features of the man on the bridge—his keen eyes piercing, as though gifted with an extra sense, what appeared to the uninitiated but a grey, foam-flecked waste—"um! so that's Mr. Algy Lennon—well, in plain English, Mr.—er—ah——"

"Tony," explained the irrepressible Third, "Tony Harrowby."

"Ah, yes, Mr. Harrowby—what do you know of Mr. Lennon's family?"

"Well, you know, sir, his aunt is the famous Duchess of Montsevern; for his mother was one of the three beautiful daughters of Sir James Raynham—only—there's a sort of family scandal or something that Algy's mother was mixed up in—and, well, he's a bit touchy on the point, and shy of mentioning her. He left home, so he told Morton, (Morton's our chief, you know) when he was thirteen—cut the whole family in fact. You see Algy has got some rum ideas on family honour and pride and all that sort of thing that a fellow out here doesn't understand exactly."

"No, I suppose not," interpolated his patient listener. "Well, go on, I'm interested in Lennon."

"Oh, well, you know he served through the usual apprenticeship on a sailing ship, and that, combined with sausage and mash at fourpence for lunch, and less than that for dinner didn't improve his temper, but it did him a lot of good some ways though, came in handy when he was wrecked on the Falklands some two years later."

"They do not indulge in 'sausage and mash at fourpence' on the Falklands, young man," the Admiral interposed rather testily.

He had the true British love of solidity, and the flippant tone and seeming levity of the Third irritated him.

Tony Harrowby looked sideways at him, as though he had unconsciously touched a dangerous explosive. He shifted his position uncertainly, and untied his long legs preparatory to making a hasty retreat if necessary.

"Go on," commanded the upper deck voice of the Admiral.

"Oh—er—yes," went on Tony, "he had funny experiences in London; sitting on doorsteps, and all that sort of thing; watching his beautiful mamma drive by in her victoria; he used to sneak round by Hyde Park Corner and watch her—she didn't see him, of course."

"So I should suppose," muttered the Admiral, pulling complacently at his well-trimmed Navy beard, "the young dog's got some grit in him, I thought I wasn't mistaken. Well," (in louder tones) "and you say he had fever in the Falklands?"

"Oh, yes; he was laid up there about six weeks, and had a pretty bad time, all the nurses in the convent

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lost their hearts to him. You can fancy Algy looking like a fallen angel to order, can't you?"

"He's got a bit of temper, though, this idol of yours, Harrowby, or I'm much mistaken."

The cautious old sea-dog was feeling his way—taking soundings all along the run.

"Should just jolly well think he has," cried Harrowby. "I've only had the luck to see him in a real scot once, and that was about a photo—photo of a girl, you know," he added in a confidential aside.

"Not at all unusual," muttered his listener, "gay young dog. I like that in a boy."

The latter half of his sentence was not intended for the ears of Harrowby.

"Yes, it was last voyage, he was Third then and I was Fourth—had only just joined. We were a day out, and Lennon was getting out things and faking up the cabin a bit. He had heaps of photos; but one, a girl in a silver frame, was different from all the others. She looked as plain and simple and solid as the frame itself. 'She's no Sydney girl,' I said to myself when I saw it. I was looking at it when Algy came down to turn in from his watch at twelve. I ought to have been asleep, but I had been doing Logarithms till late and couldn't get off. The girl in the silver frame was the only thing I couldn't take my eyes off. She made a fellow feel good, somehow—as if his mother wasn't far off."

"I know," muttered the Admiral. "Go on."

He was of the type of man who never allowed himself to feel—he "did things."

"Well, I said, just in a joky way like: 'Say, Lennon, that's the bestest girl, I suppose, the one in the silver frame?' I had not seen his face as he came in, but it seemed he had been grizzling, and no wonder, it was a filthy night, a real picnic. I didn't want to look long when I turned round. 'You cheeky young ass,' he thundered, 'what business on earth is it of yours who my photos are?' He apologised in the morning—said he was in a scot with the boy who had been sent down for his oilskins and was pretty well half-an-hour finding them—raining in sheets all the time."

He paused—his listener was rubbing his hands as if enjoying the little incident.

"Of course I asked no other questions, but next day the photo was missing from the place where it hung over the head of his bed—and I've never seen it since."

Ex-Admiral Copley drew out his watch.

"When does Lennon come off duty?"

"In an hour's time—at four—I must be off too."

"Well bring him along here, will you, to tea with me?"

Lennon's comment on the invitation was characteristic of him.

"Wonder what the old Shellback wants with me?"

But he went.

A steward had carefully placed a tray to the Admiral's order near his deck chair on the poop aft, under the awning. The quartermaster, with the regularity of a machine struck eight bells. A minute later two fine specimens that made the old sea dog's heart swell with pride, swung along the glistening white decks towards him.

"Admiral Copley—Mr. Lennon, sir," cried Harrowby in his snap-shot voice—and for once, to his credit be it told, he retreated tactfully.

"Happy to know you, Mr. Lennon—sit down, sir," said the Admiral with his fine old-fashioned courtesy, as he indicated a chair on his left. "Sorry there are no ladies to meet you, don't think many of 'em have turned up yet, so perhaps you will put up with a crusty old bachelor for once, eh? Tea—then may I trouble you to officiate."

"You cheeky young ass! What business is it of yours?"

"Thank you—yes—delighted," answered Lennon with that frank directness of tone that attracted most people to him, and his present host in particular.

They spoke of much, and of many things in common, and Richard Copley's opinion of Algy Lennon grew more and more confirmed.

It was little more than a week since he had asked him to tea on the poop, and the *Pegasus* lay alongside the wharf at Honolulu. It was evening, the mails were

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aboard, and a festive band of natives who were seeing off some friends, were making merry on deck.

The native instruments, and still more native dances were not to the taste of the Admiral, especially when copious libations of whiskey added *esprit* to the proceedings. He had gone below to look the surgeon up.

He stood by the door of his cabin, which joined on to the surgery and library, and enjoyed a quiet smoke with Vircoe, who was not at all a bad fellow, he had found. He had been laying neat little plans all day, and it was as much to those as to the Bacchanalia on deck that Vircoe owed the pleasure of his visit. He had tried every wile he knew to get an invite into Lennon's cabin, for he owned to a singular curiosity about the girl in the silver frame that Harrowby had mentioned.

No mention of anyone answering that description had passed Lennon's lips in the course of their many conversations in the smoke-room or on deck. Lennon loved to get the Admiral to talk of the old days of his cadetship in the gun-room of the *Briseus* and how they had come out on top in the manœuvres of '68.

Vircoe's room was in an alley way leading off the main deck where the officers' cabins were, and Lennon's was the one immediately opposite. By careful inquiry of his steward the Admiral had found out that the Second was in his room.

"The young dog's as proud as Lucifer—he won't ask me in for fear of risking a refusal of my patronage—yet I like him all the better for it."

"This is—er—I presume—"
"My wife, sir!"

This was very much how Richard Copley's thoughts ran as he sent the smoke rings from a fine Manilla curling to the roof.

Vircoe, who had the camera mania, was, just then, too absorbed in developing photos of some fine angolas on board to notice the abstracted mood of his guest.

The handle of the door that he had been watching so carefully turned quickly, and the object of his thoughts swung out as if to walk down the main deck unaware of the presence of his friend.

"Hi, Lennon!—excuse me, Vircoe, but I want to see Lennon," and the old sea-dog blundered over the brass bound doorsill nearly into the arms of the astonished Second.

"I say, Lennon, don't you think it's about time you returned the compliment, and asked me into your room for a smoke?"

Lennon flushed. The Admiral's determination was too obvious to be ignored this time. He rose to the occasion.

"I did not know, sir, that you would care to. I shall be most happy to welcome you now if you care to come in."

His late excellency Admiral Copley, enjoying a quiet smoke in the room deputed to the use of the Second Officer of a mail boat was perhaps an anomaly; but I have before remarked he was not a man to feel or think things—he did them.

"Plenty of photographs I see, Lennon—like to see a young fellow fond of the girls," he remarked, seating himself comfortably and puffing out clouds of smoke on the faces of pretty brunettes in pale tinted theatre wraps, and fair sorceresses in fancy costumes.

Lennon glanced casually round.

"These are mere chance acquaintances, sir, that one meets once, or perhaps twice in a life-time, in a life like ours—some passengers and most of them colonials."

He hesitated while the colour mounted high on his clear forehead.

"There is one I'd like to show you, Admiral Copley. I think you would appreciate it. It is not for the chance visitor who does not."

He drew out the drawer from beneath his bed and took from it the silver frame, handing it almost reverently to his guest.

The latter coughed—like most sailors he was sometimes at a loss for a word.

"This is—er—I presume——"

"My wife, sir," answered Lennon.

And for once Richard Copley's self-possession nearly forsook him—he gripped the frame more firmly to assure himself of the tangibility of something.

His host was idly fingering the things on the little writing-table near the wall—his back to his guest.

With a mighty effort Richard Copley recovered speech.

"You sly young scamp, why didn't you tell me before—I congratulate you, Lennon, with all my heart and soul,"—he glanced again at the photo—"you ought to be a happy man."

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Algy took the photo from him almost jealously, smiling a bitter little smile that his guest had often noticed there before.

"Aye, sir—and would if I were not continually feeling what a fool a poor devil of a mail-boat Second is to allow himself to be human—on his pay."

A look of pain drew a thin sharp line where the lips with their easy curves closed.

The inscrutable face of Ex-Admiral Copley betrayed nothing—he waited, having found the root of the canker worm—to see its length.

"You see, sir, promotion is—well you know what it is in the services, it's no better here, and rather worse if anything, and a fellow gets sick of waiting for his R.N.R. Commission, badly as they say the Navy wants recruiting—and the odds are he doesn't even get it at all."

"How long have you sent in your application?" queried Admiral Copley.

"Eighteen months," and Lennon passed his hand wearily over his young face that seemed to have suddenly grown years older as he sank on his bed behind him. "And the worst of it is there's another promotion waiting for me when I get back that was to have been conditional on the other—I know *she* wanted it so."

He paused with a hard, dry lump in the throat.

The Admiral, who knew his book of human nature very well, did not ask who she might be; he merely glanced at the drawer where Algy had carefully laid the photo, locking it after him.

He also made a very shrewd guess at the nature of the other promotion—the promotion that fate seemed to be so prodigal with—deserved or undeserved.

"Where do you expect to get the cable, Lennon?"

The question might have seemed irrelevant to a novice in the school of life, but the two men understood.

"At Brisbane, sir, on the way back. I've been on the rack coming up, it will be far worse going down."

The undemonstrative man of the sea laid his hand on the arm of his young friend.

"I say, Lennon, cheer up, there's a good sort of chap; why, there might be a double promotion when you get down again, old man, the Admiralty is a slow going machine but sure; it takes a bit of starting, that's all."

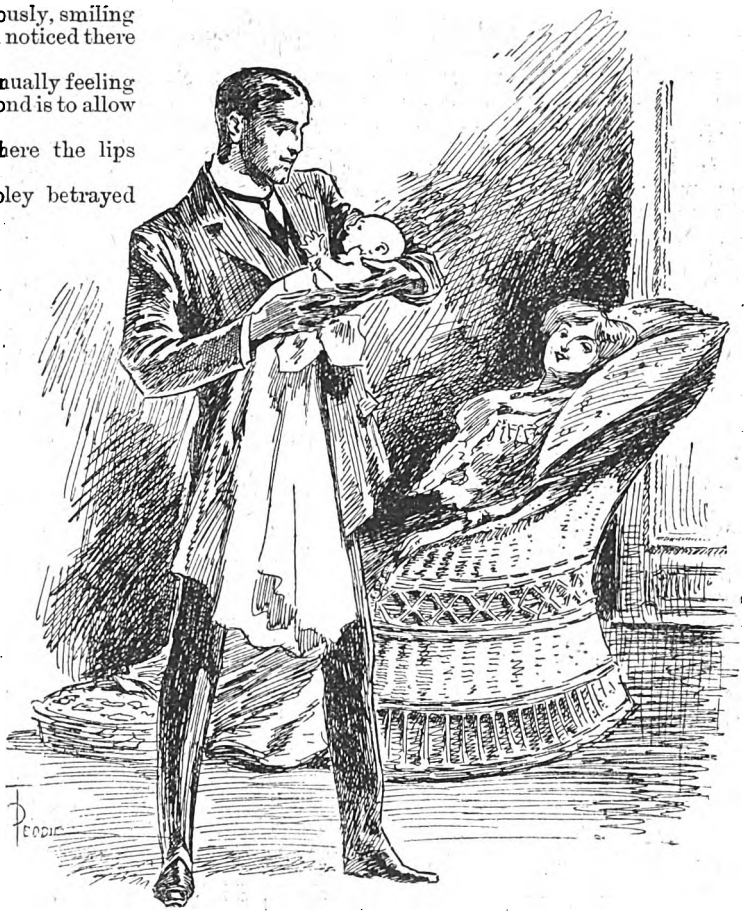
And as the smoke rings curled upward, Richard Copley pondered in his slow-moving brain how best one could "do things," whether from New York or Vancouver.

His roving eye caught the clock.

"I say, young fellow, if you're going to be fresh for the middle watch, it's about time you turned in; and—I say Lennon, send me a cable just to say how things turn out, will you? The Senior Navy Club, New York, will find me."

And the two men parted with a better appreciation of each other that increased daily till the end of the voyage.

Ex-Admiral Copley, late of the South Pacific Fleet, sat in the smoke room of the Senior Navy Club N.Y.



"Seems to me, Mabel, he hasn't the Lennon phiz at all."

He was pondering over the wording of a cable, an answer to one he had just received. It ran:

"Promoted to father and Lieutenant R.N.R. Boy and mother splendid."

He filled up the form before him at last to his own satisfaction and handed it to the coloured boy who waited by the door.

"H'm—so the machine has worked at last," he reflected as the door closed; "only wanted a little oiling, I suppose. Wonder if Lennon will guess I had a hand in it?"

And a complacent smile crept over the weather-beaten, kindly old face of Richard Copley as he thought of another satisfactory cable he had received.

"To think that after all these years I should have found little Kate and her bairns—suppose there'll be a batch of boys who want to get into the Navy, too—let me see, Sprigg does not say how many there are"—he referred to the cable he had received from his lawyer—"ah, well, Fate plays us strange tricks, and I know now why I was so struck with the girl in the silver frame."

A few hours later, as he paced the deck of the *Campania* bound for home in the teeth of a snow-laden

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wind, a couple, in a very different clime, were reading his answer with an expression of puzzled bewilderment.

It was summer with them—an Australian summer's day in December, and a moist, sultry heat, the heat that is most trying in Sydney, hung over all. The thermometer in the room that led off the wide balcony where the heat had driven them, registered, and had done for some hours, 98°.

Through the joints of the loosely strung Jap blinds, a slight breeze from time to time swept in a little purer air from over the horse-shoe bay at their feet.

Algy Lennon, in a flannel suit, a smile of ineffable content of his clear cut face and a new air of condescending patronage towards the world in general—that is, the poor unfortunate beings who happened to be living outside his world at that moment—was on duty, a new duty, and there were many observations to be taken.

He had told the nurse who had gladly retired that, "He'd take that watch and she'd better turn in when she had the chance."

The object of his observations, judging from the remarks he made at intervals, was not a thing of beauty.

"Seems to me, Mabel," he said, addressing a rather wan and white edition of the girl in the silver frame, "seems to me he must be a Playfair, he hasn't the Lennox phiz at all—not even his father's nose as a redeeming feature—and really, Mab, he's just the colour of those mud pies we used to make when we were nippers—in the half-baked stage you know."

He ducked his head to avoid the missile aimed at him by his wife and went on pacing his "quarter-deck" as she called it, singing lustily at intervals snatches from "Pinafore."

At about the fifth repetition of "stick to your desks" etc., the slandered lump of humanity he carried gave vent to a prolonged howl and was as promptly seized by his indignant mother.

"H'm, doesn't seem to appreciate Gilbert and Sullivan."

"Of course not, you stupid boy, how can you expect an infant of two weeks old to appreciate or understand *Pinafore*, why, it's what someone in the Bible, I forget who, calls 'strong meat for babies.' You must commence with nursery rhymes and work up gradually."

At this point they were disturbed by the advent of Biddy, the Irish maid, with the cable that caused such consternation. For a few moments the then *summum bonum* of their lives was relegated to a second place as they read the brief wording of the telegram:

"Congratulations on both counts from yours cordially,

"Uncle Dick.

"Senior Navy Club, New York."

"But who can it be from, Algy?" gasped Mabel Lennon at last.

"Why, it's from old Copley—Admiral Copley I told you about from Honolulu—didn't I mention his name? sorry—we took him up last time and a very decent old fossil he was, too; but why 'Uncle Dick'—has he adopted us, I wonder?"

And it was Mabel Lennon with her quick woman's instinct that solved the problem.

"Copley, did you say, Dick, why that was the Little Mater's name. She had a brother who was in the Navy, too, and we as children nearly worshipped him as a sort of mythical fairy godfather, from whom poor mother had expectations, when the family cut her off without the shilling for marrying Maurice Playfair, a curate, with no living. Uncle Dick and she were great chums, she told us, and she always felt he would have understood and been kind; but he went abroad. Oh I see it all now as plain as daylight."

"And," said Algy, slipping down on to the floor of the verandah, his head very near the one disengaged hand that rested on the ledge of the long cane chair, "and her daughter did another foolish thing and married a poor beggar of a mail-boat man, eh?"

The hand slipped down on to the head with the protective gesture that is a part of some women.

"I used to think you were the sillier of the two, dear, but you're the very cleverest goose in the wide world, for you've 'struck' uncle Richard, the family gold mine."

There was a restless movement from the flimsy looking bundle that lay on the other arm and two pairs of eyes were immediately turned on him in penitence.

"I'm afraid you've been horribly neglected, old man, but we must have an innings sometimes you know," said his proud father, "and besides we don't discover the family gold mine—and a godfather—and an uncle for you all in one, every day. Say, Mabel, we won't quarrel over the name anyway will we now, eh?"

"No, I suppose it will have to be Dick—Richard Algernon Lennon, R.N.—it fits rather well, doesn't it, Algy?"

General Approval

From places all over the United Kingdom letters have been coming to us expressing appreciation of the beautiful and lifelike bust of Queen Victoria, which we are offering to our readers.

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THE LION'S WARS

The Crimean War.

1854-6.

IT has been said that nations never realise the causes of their wars.

This may be true at the moment when the war is being waged, for party passion, and the craft of ministers seeking to disguise their real objects may keep the truth back for a time.

But the mists, as a rule, clear when the tangled threads come to be unravelled by the historian later on.

A study of the Crimean War confirms this conclusion. In France, a very large number of intelligent people believe that the war was precipitated by Napoleon III. to strengthen the crumbling foundations of his throne.

In this country, it is held by some that it was a wholly unjust war and would never have occurred had we taken the trouble to make our aims clear to Russia, others share the opinion entertained by the late Prince Consort, who, for some reason, thought it was in every way a most just war.

There is still, or rather there was, another section who considered that the Czar was justified in taking up a firm position on the question of the Holy Places as champion of the Orthodox Greek Church.

The public in general regarded the Holy Places as a transparent pretext, and declared that the Russian object was much more practical.

That indeed it was geographical, and that the emperor of the frost-bound region of the north was longing to transfer the capital to the Bosphorus in order to procure a free outlet to the Mediterranean.

One other point still lingers in the controversial region.

Did we drift into the war? Most people say we did and yet that seems doubtful, for the Emperor Nicholas had already shown his hand when his armies crossed the Pruth.

Then it was that our statesmen saw that we must fight or let Russia have her way.

How could we have drifted into war when Russia had ample time to recede months before hostilities commenced? The expedition we dispatched reached Malta, and Russia made no sign.

By the time the troops landed at Gallipoli and Scutari the attitude of the Czar was more defiant than ever. We again ask how can we be said to have slipped into war when weeks elapsed before the allied generals received orders to take Sebastopol, the fortress in the Crimea which was regarded by the Turks as a menace to the safety of Constantinople.

War having been declared, the troops embarked at Varna, landing on the shores of the Crimea in the middle of September, 1854. The British infantry was divided into five divisions of which the Duke of Cambridge commanded one, and consisted of about 26,000 men.

The cavalry, a magnificent corps, exceeded 2,000 under the command of the Earl of Lucan and the dashing Earl of Cardigan. The guns numbered sixty. The entire force was under the command of Lord Raglan, an officer who had served with distinction under Wellington in the Peninsular War.

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Equally as experienced was Marshal St. Arnaud who commanded the French troops numbering 30,000 men with sixty-eight guns. The gross total of the allied forces was 64,000 inclusive of the Turkish contingent 6,000 strong.

Splendidly situated as Great Britain is for the peaceful pursuits of trade, the advantages of our insular position in times of war are not so clear. We are safe from invasion, it is true, but the problem of how to feed and supply an army sent across the sea had never been mastered till a later time in history. How the ill-clad, half-starved soldiers who fought for us in the Crimea ever contrived to win a battle is a much greater mystery than the causes of the war.

On September 19th, the allied forces, under the protection of the fleet, marched along the coast till they reached the heights of Alma. Here they came in touch with the Russian army comprising 36,000 infantry, 4,000 cavalry, and ninety guns under Prince Mentschikoff.

The heights which ran from 100ft. to 600ft. high constituted in themselves a series of natural fortresses, but their strength was added to by redoubts, trenches, and skilfully placed batteries.

Had Alma been fought towards the end of the war when the commissariat had utterly broken down it is certain we should have been defeated, but each man, according to Kinglake, carried sufficient ammunition for two battles and the means of subsistence for three. Feed the British soldier well and he will do anything and go anywhere, so with plenty of food in his knapsack, Mr. Atkins did not inquire why the heights of Alma had been selected as the point of attack.

As none of the Crimean generals have ever condescended to enlighten the world why they fought the battle of Alma we are driven to the conclusion that we engaged the Russians there because the Russians wanted us to.

It is extraordinary that Lord Raglan the moment he caught sight of the great Redoubt on the heights, with its twelve heavy guns and four batteries of field artillery to say nothing of sixteen battalions of infantry and a large force of sailors, did not exclaim:

"Not here, we will try lower down."

We had been shepherded there but no one seemed to think so.

The French on our right were so pleased at having the support of nine ships of war that they actually thought their position admirable. And so it was.

Although the heights were terribly hard to climb, the Russian engineers had omitted to strengthen them as they had done those confronting our men by artificial works. To still further increase their chances of success the guns of the French war vessels searched the heights before the troops began to scale them. As defeat would have ruined the expedition it was perhaps as well that the burden of the day should rest on our shoulders.

The Russian generals being ignorant of the quality of the British soldier never dreamt of defeat. Their Commander-in-chief, it is said, gazed just before the fight at the steep cliffs rising almost sheer above the shore, and exclaimed:

"Devils might get up here, but British soldiers never."

The French attack had already commenced when the order was given for ours to begin. The men had been formed into two lines, with cavalry on their flanks, some hours before and were greatly relieved when the order to advance was given.

To this day historians are sorely puzzled to account for the troops being dispatched in close formation instead of being widely extended in skirmishing order.

We can answer the question. The generals did not understand their business.

An extended line would have enabled the troops to swing round and envelope the Great Redoubt. But huddled together, we soon, owing to the rugged surface of the ground, got into disorder, melting into a confused mob, regiments mingling with regiments, brigades with brigades, long before the summit was reached.

When the mob in red arrived at the top they were so delighted, especially as it had all been done without orders from their officers, that they resolved on a fresh experiment.

So they gave the Russians a taste of what they could do in the fighting line minus commanders, by charging a dense column comprising several thousand men.

The Russians, never having fought us before were so surprised at the daring of charging in line, that they ran away.

Greatly elated, the leaderless soldiers stormed some intrenchments not far off and bayoneted all impudent enough to remain.

When the officers did intervene it was to order the retreat of the Light Infantry, who were gallantly holding a position they had won under a heavy fire. It was not necessary we should, and why the bugle was sounded is another of the mysteries of the Crimean War still awaiting solution.

Its effect was to precipitate the retreating force right into the centre of the Grenadiers who were coming to their assistance and so threw it into confusion.

Still no harm was done. The Grenadiers climbed the heights; the troops ordered to retreat crept after them and, aided by some Highland regiments who got to work on the flanks of the Russian columns, drove them back.

Lord Raglan seeing that matters were going in our favour pushed up another brigade, which, coming in contact with a Russian column hurrying to the assistance of comrades who were faring so badly at the hands of the Grenadiers and Highlanders, were assailed so fiercely that they fell back in great confusion.

When our men came in touch they formed up and with a great rush and much hurrahing carried the Great Redoubt. A galling fire from a couple of well-handled Russian guns forced us to retire, but we soon came again and the battle was won.

The French had not done so well. They had clung all the afternoon in isolated bodies to some positions on the slopes of the cliff. When the Russians retreated the French bounded gaily to the summit of the cliff in the belief that Alma had been won by them.

Truly a most extraordinary battle.

The Russians escaped with a loss of 5,700 killed and wounded, five Generals, and twenty-three Field Officers. That of the Allies was not so heavy. The French loss was sixty killed and 500 wounded, ours 362 killed and 1,400 wounded. In all with officers about 2,000.

After resting, the Allies resumed their march, the cavalry pushing on to Belbec, a small village eight miles from Sebastopol.

On the following day the allied armies took possession of some hills hard by. The fortifications already reared on the northern side of Sebastopol seemed so formidable

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Captain Nolan galloped after the men and frantically signalled.

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that Lord Raglan marched his army right across the country to the southern side in utter ignorance of the danger to which he was exposed from a flank attack.

But the Russians let the opportunity slip allowing the Allies on September 28th to take up a strong position in front of the port and town of Balaclava.

Even then a bold assault might have carried Sebastopol, but the wrangle which the proposition gave rise to between General Cathcart, General Burgoyne, Admiral Lyons, and Lord Raglan, was so prolonged that the council of war separated without a decision having been come to.

When an assault was seen to be hopeless the siege train was landed. Then commenced the most ridiculous siege of which history has any record. Indeed, for a long time it was not a siege at all for we could not obtain access to the harbour owing to the Russians having sunk some vessels at the entrance, and one side of the town was not invested at all, leaving the Russians free to come and go as they pleased.

The only portion of Sebastopol we could invest was less than four miles in extent, and, to crown all, the defending force was considerably larger than the investing, which is, of course, a reversal of the facts usually associated with sieges.

October 5th is the date of the celebrated battle of Balaclava. The charge of the British cavalry at this battle is acknowledged to be one of the most daring to be found in the annals of warfare. Rash as was the enterprise, its execution was somehow accompanied by much method. It may have been a folly, a sacrifice, the very madness of heroism, what you will, but it achieved the most momentous results.

The squadrons who dashed into, and fought their way out of the rain of death saved the town of Balaclava from being captured by the Russians.

Balaclava was necessary to us as the base from which we drew our supplies, and the Russians knowing its value made a bold bid for its capture. To resist the coming attack all we could muster was some 4,000 infantry, 1,200 cavalry and 40 guns. The Russians had massed for the enterprise over 40,000 men.

The battle commenced by an attack on the lines held by the Turkish forces. The French becoming alarmed at the increasing masses of Russians pouring out of Sebastopol sent the Ottoman troops some aid. For all this the Turks gave way the moment they were pressed, which led to Sir Colin Campbell pushing forward some regiments of Highlanders to stiffen their defence.

The moment the Turks retreated, the Russians swiftly pursued till they found their progress barred by the thin red line two deep. Against this thin red streak, which Sir Colin declared he did not think it necessary to reinforce, the Russians hurled their choicest troops, but in vain. The Russian horse galloped madly at the line a dozen times and every time retreated with scores of saddles empty, whilst an irate Scotch laird was railing at and beating the retiring Turks to the intense amusement of the Highlanders.

A message to Sebastopol had brought on to the hill a dense cloud of horse which at once descended into the valley. As they rode they came in touch with six squadrons of our Light Horse. The edge of the ridge above us was so thickly clustered with Muscovite horse that General Scarlett who had been sent by Lord Raglan to the assistance of the retreating Turks resolved to dislodge them. It was a hazardous thing to attempt, but General Scarlett knew the sort of men he had under him. Lord Lucan who rode up at the moment must also have had a high opinion of our cavalry for he approved of General Scarlett's decision.

Scarlett and his little band of 300 dashed up the green hill side, gave one great cheer, and then disappeared in the dense mass of Russian horse over 3,000 strong. To aid their comrades who were too hard at work emptying Russian saddles to cut their way back, some Dragoons and Royals charged the Russians in flank. A few minutes later the enemy were in full flight.

No one can accuse the Russian soldiers of cowardice. They are probably as brave a race as any in the world, and yet 3,000 of their picked horsemen were hustled and driven off the field by some 600 British troopers. Nothing, of course, came of this magnificent achievement. Had General Scarlett or Lord Cardigan known anything of war they would have followed up the retreating Russians. Had they done so their annihilation would have been certain.

Seeing that the retreat of the Russian horse provided an opportunity of recovering the heights which had been abandoned earlier in the day, Lord Raglan gave orders for the cavalry to advance. As Lord Lucan, misunderstanding the order, did nothing, Lord Raglan, to prevent the Russians from carrying off as trophies the British guns they had taken from the Turks, sent Captain Nolan with a note peremptorily ordering him to prevent the enemy from carrying off the guns.

"What guns, sir?" cried Lord Lucan.

Lord Raglan, of course, meant the guns the Russians had taken from the Turks, of which fact, it seems, Lord Lucan knew nothing. Nolan, instead of clearing up matters, exclaimed warmly:

"There is the enemy and there are the guns, my lord," and rode away.

Lord Lucan looked in the direction of the Russian cavalry and seeing a battery of guns in the valley behind which the Russian horse had reformed after their recent defeat, instructed Lord Cardigan to capture them.

Poor soldier as he was, Cardigan saw that to charge a battery a mile off protected by riflemen and other batteries on either flank meant destruction.

"I know it," said Lucan, "but Lord Raglan will have it so."

A moment later the trumpet sounded and the British cavalry rode into the valley of death. Captain Nolan galloped up after the men had started and frantically signalled that they were going the wrong way, but no one heeded.

The historic charge of Balaclava is so well known that there is no need to recapitulate it in these pages. Suffice it to say that under a tremendous cross fire they rode straight for the guns. A volley, when they got close, tore great gaps in their ranks, but our brave fellows held on, galloped past the guns and plunged right into the Russian cavalry in the rear.

The fight which followed should have ended in the complete destruction of the daring band, but thanks to the surprise of the Russians and a timely attack by the French Chasseurs d'Afrique against the Russian left enabled the few remaining troopers, not more than 220 unwounded men, to re-form and charge back with even more impetuosity.

It was lucky they did, for their momentum was so great that they literally rode over some Russians Lancers who had stolen round to the rear to cut them off.

"Hurrah!" they cried, "the road is clear."

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Our cavalry rode into the fatal valley 673 strong, and of these 163 were killed and 134 wounded.

The day after Balaclava the Russians made a most determined assault on the division under General de Lacy Evans. The attack was repulsed, but its delivery revealed such a weakness in our position at Mount Inkerman, the key of the allied position, that the Russians secretly massed a huge force of 40,000 men to attack us, the garrison at the same time making a sortie to engage the attention of the French. The Russian plan was bold and ably conceived. Had it succeeded, the French army would have been destroyed; for Inkerman taken, the huge Russian army would have had the French between two fires.

The ardour of the Russian troops having been inflamed by appeals to their faith and the dishonour of allowing invaders to occupy their soil, the force of the Russians on November 5th was hurled against the position occupied by us.

Favoured by the grey mist of the early morning, the enemy climbed the steep ascent and had driven in our outposts before we became aware of the danger. To prevent them from working round our rear the thin red line became so lengthened, that it was with the most difficulty our brave fellows kept it intact.

Again and again dense masses of grey-coated Russians were hurled against us. Regiment after regiment were hurried up and the most desperate efforts made to beat down our resistance by sheer weight of numbers, but with the dogged courage the British infantry have ever displayed in moments of supreme danger, they held to their position.

Our generals, it is true, hurried up troops as soon as the real object of the Russians became apparent, otherwise there was no attempt to defeat the enemy by well-devised counter-attacks.

In fact, Inkerman might be described as purely a soldier's battle.

When our lines were broken, which they often were by sheer weight of numbers, the troops without any orders from their officers, at once formed into a number of compact little bodies and pushed the Russians back to their old positions.

From first to last there was no manœuvring. Up and down the mountain, in glens and valleys, ridges and plateaux we fought the Russians with such determined courage that for all the vastness of their numbers they began to yield.

A combined movement or a charge of cavalry might have given us the victory sooner, but as the confusion was too great to permit of this we had to trust to the effect of a number of isolated victories. When the ammunition gave out we threw stones. When these in their turn were exhausted we invoked the bayonet.

The battle commenced at 5.45. a.m., and Tommy was still hard at work at eight in the evening. Shortly after the Russian attack collapsed, and by nine they were in full retreat.

As might be supposed from the fierceness of the fighting the death-roll was very great. Our forces at the commencement of the fight were 7,464 infantry and 200 cavalry. Yet this handful inflicted on the Russians a loss of 10,729 killed, wounded and missing. Our own casualties amounting to 597 killed and 1,760 wounded.

The Russians having realised that their troops were no match for the British in the open, now devoted their energies to strengthening the defences of Sebastopol. The elements, too, now ranged themselves on their side. The winter of 1854 was so terribly severe that disease soon made its appearance.

Without good food, warm clothing, and comfortable housing no troops could expect to withstand the hardships of a siege with the thermometer frequently at zero. The War Office knew perfectly well what would happen if the comforts of the men were not attended to, but their system was so antiquated and swathed in red tape that with its defects increased by the incapacity of the officials they nearly wiped out the British Army altogether. Whilst Whitehall was squabbling with the Horse Guards on questions of routine the soldiers were left without clothing and food.

During 1855 Sebastopol was bombarded five times, the guns of the French, which numbered over 200 pieces of large calibre, doing great damage. But we were not idle, for our gunners fired no fewer than 89,540 round shot and 12,723 bombs.

After we had stormed the Redan and taken the Malikoff the Russians blew up the remaining forts and evacuated the city.

Russia, now finding herself sorely crippled in the Baltic as well as the sea, asked for an armistice.

In March, 1856, peace was signed at Paris, to the joy of the nation, who were weary of the fearful blundering of the War Office, which in 1854 was so shocking that thousands of our best troops perished from want of food and clothing.

[Next Week: THE SCINDE WAR, 1842-43.]

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SHORT STORIES THAT MAKE YOU LAUGH.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "Guilty Gold," by Headon Hill, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, March 4th. Post-cards only, please.

The Prize of One Guinea for the best Storyette has been won this week by Mrs. E. REES, 15 Airedale College Terrace, Undercliffe Lane, Bradford, Yorks.

Then Everybody Laughed.

SOME time since a counsel engaged in a case in which property of various descriptions was involved, made a long and rambling speech referring to each kind in turn. His monotonous delivery had sent nearly everyone to sleep, when he suddenly startled them all by abruptly changing his voice as he exclaimed to the judge:

"My lord, I will now address myself to the furniture!"

"You have been doing that for some time, I think, Mr. X," remarked the judge sweetly, amid universal tittering.

Now, there was another judge who had heard this anecdote, and was storing it up for use on some future occasion.

At last his opportunity seemed to have arrived. He was trying a case in which the circumstances were somewhat similar, but the property involved was live stock.

In due course, one of the counsel said:

"My lord, I will now address myself to the donkey."

"You have been doing that for some time," was the prompt response, whereupon a regular roar of laughter followed, which highly gratified the judge until its true reason dawned upon him.

E. R.

The Army from Within.

A CERTAIN Irish Militia regiment had to furnish the main guard in a large garrison. On the field-officer of the day visiting the guard, to his surprise he found no sentry on the post, and, wrathful at his discovery, entered the guard-room to ascertain the cause.

The guard-room was empty, with the exception of one Militiaman crouching over the glowing ashes of the fire, who turned on his seat and gazed at the irate field-officer with mingled curiosity and admiration.

The Field-Officer: "Where the dickens is the sentry?"

Militiaman: "The sentry, is it? Bedad, he's away beyant" (with a vague wave of a clay pipe) "kicking football."

Field-Officer: "Oh! Where's the guard?"

Militiaman: "The guard? Begor, they're kicking football, too."

Field-Officer: "Oh! Where's the sergeant of the guard?"

Militiaman: "The sargint? Never a know I knows, unless" (as a bright idea strikes him) "he's kicking football, too."

Field-Officer: "And who the dickens are you?"

Militiaman: "Me, is it? Begor! I'm the prisoner."

R. F.

Took Offence.

SOME time ago the play of *Hamlet* was performed at a provincial theatre.

In the scene with Polonius the crafty old courtier asks:

"Do you know me, my lord?"

And the Prince responds:

"Excellent well; you are a fishmonger?"

On hearing this, an old fishwoman stood up, and shaking her fist, shouted excitedly:

"Well, and s'posing he is? That's better than play-acting any day."

J. T.

Sharp Boy.

A BOARD schoolmaster had been giving his class a lesson in the mysteries of forming the degrees of comparison of the different adjectives.

He finished the lesson by making them repeat some of the things he had told them over again.

Amongst other questions he asked:

"Now, what is the superlative of the adjective 'nice'?"

A little lad instantly put up his hand to show that he knew the answer.

"Well, Harry," said the master, "what do you think is the superlative of nice?"

"Jam pudden!" promptly responded Harry.

D. J.

Any More?

A FRECKLE-FACED girl stopped at the post-office and yelled out:

"Anything for the Murphys?"

"No; there is not."

"Anything for Jane Murphy?"

"Nothing."

"Anything for Ann Murphy?"

"No."

"Anything for Tom Murphy?"

"No."

"Anything for Bob Murphy?"

"No."

"Anything for Terry Murphy?"

"No; nor Pat Murphy, nor Paul Murphy, nor Pete Murphy, nor Denis Murphy, nor for any Murphy—dead, living, unborn, native or foreign, civilised or uncivilised, savage or barbarous, male or female, black or white, franchised or disfranchised, convicted or otherwise. No; there is positively nothing for any of the Murphys, either individually, jointly, severally, now and for ever, one and inseparable."

The girl glanced at the postmaster in astonishment and said:

"Please to look if there is anything for Clarence Murphy."

C. F.

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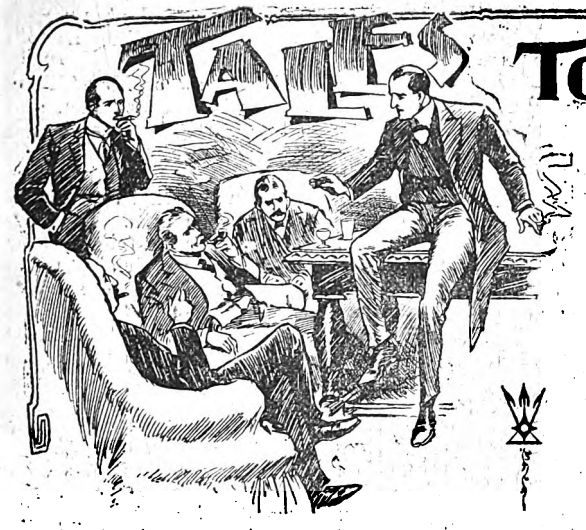

TOLD "OFF DUTY."

[You probably don't know the "Stand-Easy" Club. It isn't in the directory, and you might live next door to the place for years without knowing of its existence by that name. It isn't a conventional club; there is no subscription, and there is no register of members. It is merely a room in a quiet, orderly, and select hostelry in Westminster, where, by common consent, a number of officials of all kinds meet when "off duty." There you may find detectives from Scotland Yard, near by; firemen, commissionaires, a soldier or two, and maybe a doctor from St. Thomas's Hospital or elsewhere. A motley crowd they would be if they wore their uniforms, but at the "Stand-Easy" uniforms are a rarity, "mufti" being the unwritten rule. The result is a gathering of quiet, well-behaved, and well-dressed men. Saturday night is the time when one sees the biggest muster, for then it is the custom for one member to regale the company with a story, the story being, as a rule, an account of some incident in the teller's own career. Here is a story told by Inspector Nicholls, a detective of great reputation.]

A West End Mystery.

Told by INSPECTOR NICHOLLS.

I.

A Frightened Conscience.

There is nothing so remarkable as the way in which a clue will sometimes come to a detective in a most indirect manner, that will enable him to solve a mystery that otherwise would baffle all human skill. Perhaps there is not so much credit due to the detective who receives such aid, but I think the reader will allow that the alertness of mind and the faculty for putting remote and seemingly disconnected incidents together, and at a time and place far removed, deserve a fair share of commendation.

There are several cases I know of that would have remained unsolvable mysteries to this day, but for such fortunate accidents. One was the Allibone murder. I was enabled to solve it by one of these fortuitous circumstances, and as it happened a good many years ago, there will be no harm in giving the facts of the case here, though I shall not mention the right names because one branch of the family still figures prominently in the public eye.

I had been living in the Westminster Bridge Road for three weeks or more at a lodging house, the respectability of which was suspected. It was directly opposite a house the disrespectability of which was known, and it was this place and its inmates that I had under surveillance.

I was supposed to be a clerk out of employment, and I came and went at all hours. I was just setting out about two o'clock one afternoon to follow a character who had emerged from the opposite house, when one of the young chaps who occupied the next room to myself, and who seemed to live pretty well by doing nothing, came in in such a state of terror and collapse that I involuntarily offered him assistance as far as his room. We had met on the stairs.

It was not drink I could see at once, though to an inexperienced eye it might have seemed that the fellow was suffering from delerium tremens. He strode forth and back in the room, flinging out his arms for a time and then sinking into a chair and moaned.

"He's done it! He said he would, poisoned! O-o-o-grh-grh!"

An indescribable gurgle ended each exclamation.

"What is it? Has your mate shuffled off?"

I tried to pacify and obtain from him some idea of his trouble, but I could get no other expression from him, so I left him, and hurried out to see if my quarry had escaped me.

I was chagrined to find that he was not in sight, and I walked towards Westminster Bridge in anything but a pleasant mood.

There were some matters I had to report at the first opportunity at Scotland Yard so I made my way there.

A special edition of the afternoon papers were just out as I crossed the Bridge, and the boys were screaming out:

"Terrible sensation! West End murder!"

I bought a paper and was shocked to find an account of the murder of Richard Allibone, M.P. at his residence in Russell Square. I knew the man well and it was a painful surprise.

When I arrived at the Yard I learned from the chief the few facts that had been wired and telephoned in, and that Inspector Quaritch had been despatched to the scene.

As a personal friend of the popular M.P. I asked to be put on the case at once and the chief gave me the opportunity.

I hurried to the scene as fast as a cab could take me. On the way I thought of many things, but scarcely dwelt upon the murder and what I should find when I arrived. My mind did revert briefly to the unfortunate

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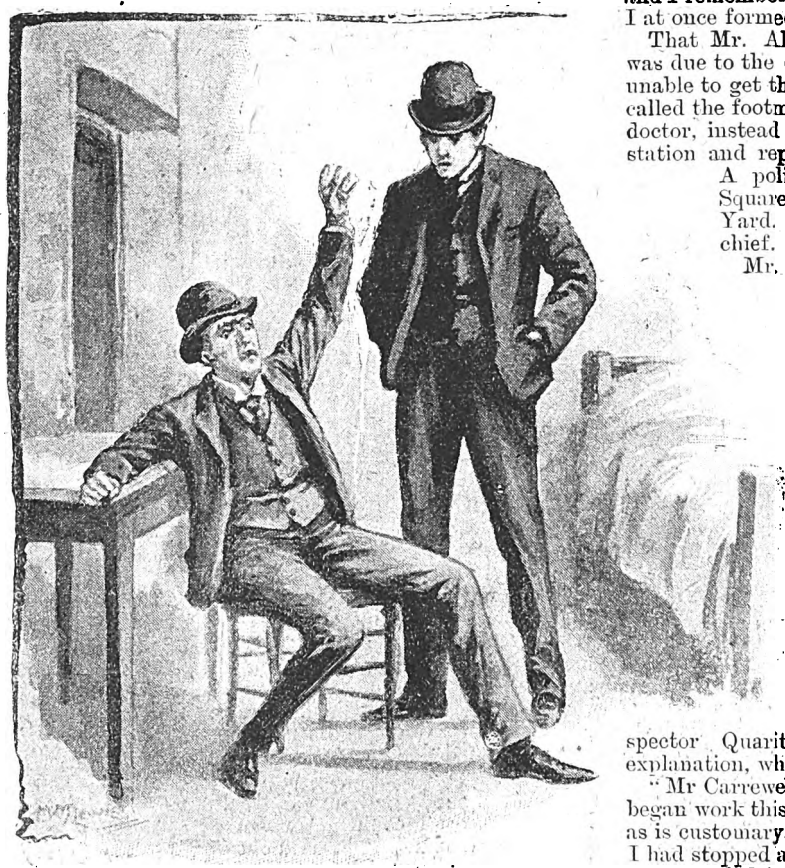
chap I had left in a bad way in my temporary lodging-house, but not to connect him in any way with this tragedy.

When I arrived at Allibone House I was ushered into the drawing-room and was cordially received by Richard Allibone!



"He's done it! He said he would. Poisoned! O-o-o-grh-grh!"

II.

Was It An Accident?

When I say that he greeted me cordially, I mean that he recognised me and gripped my hand tightly, though he said nothing.

His eyes shone with tears, and I knew he could not then trust himself to speak.

He walked away, and presently came back again and pointing to the next room, the door of which was closed, he burst out:

"Great Heavens! Nicholls, my poor child lies in that room dead! My only child, my all, my beautiful girl!"

He wrung my hand again, and though his voice quavered, he manfully restrained himself from giving way to his grief. I tried to comfort him as best I could.

As I entered the room, the Inspector nodded to me. He was sitting at one end of a little table in the centre of the room. On one side the servants were ranged, five in all, and on the other side, seated at a writing-table was a young man who seemed indifferent to all that was taking place.

It was Henry Carrewe, the nephew of Mr. Allibone, and his private secretary. I had never met him, and I found myself glancing at him furtively several times, and I remember distinctly the sub-conscious dislike that I at once formed for him.

That Mr. Allibone had been reported as murdered was due to the excitability of the servants. The butler, unable to get the family physician on the telephone, had called the footman and sent him out to fetch the nearest doctor, instead of which he had gone to the nearest station and reported that his master had been killed.

A police-officer was at once sent to Russell Square, and the report was sent in to Scotland Yard. This had been corrected since I left the chief.

Mr. Allibone regretted the presence of police. It was not a case which demanded them. He explained to me that it was all an accident. Had the physician arrived before any word had reached the police, it is terrible to think—in the light of after events—how different would have been the ending.

When the Inspector arrived he found the girl dead, and a physician did not arrive until a few minutes later. There was clearly nothing for him to do but investigate the case.

Quaritch was a careful man, and it is to this partly that I owe my success on the case. If he had hurried and bungled the job he would have had it all over before I arrived.

After Mr. Allibone had explained to me the nature of the accident, the servants having been examined, Inspector Quaritch called upon Mr. Allibone for an explanation, which he seemed disposed to make now.

"Mr Carrewe here is my secretary," he began. "We began work this morning as usual. I was dictating and as is customary, I was walking up and down the room. I had stopped a moment to pour myself out a glass of water and drink, when suddenly my daughter, burst into the room, screaming, 'father, father, don't!'——

"I am at a loss to say what it was she tried to warn me not to do, but at that instant she caught her foot upon the liassock, stumbled and fell heavily on the floor.

"I stooped to raise her. I had been alarmed at the terror that was depicted upon her face. It was awful. What was my grief to find that she was unconscious.

"Violent as the fall had been, I did not think it could have been fatal. I thought she had fainted. I took the glass of water from which I had drunk and dashed it in her face. She opened her eyes for an instant, whispered, 'father, father,' and fell back dead.

"I did not then believe it though, and continued to moisten her face with water from the pitcher, and sent the butler for a physician. Dr. Hardyce and Dr. Hale arrived as you know some few minutes after you."

At this moment the door of the next room opened, and the two physicians entered. Mr. Allibone turned to them eagerly. They shook their heads.

"We have done all we can," said Dr. Hale, "there is no hope. There are symptoms of poisoning, though they are obscure and rare. An autopsy."

"No, no," exclaimed Mr. Allibone. "It cannot be.

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How can she be poisoned? Spare me that. My beautiful girl. Dead! Dead!"

He buried his face in his hands and wept with that grief of the aged who, in bereavement such as this, have no hope save in death and the reunion that shall follow it.

It was discovered now that Miss Allibone's maid was missing, that she had not been examined. This was suspicious and significant, and the butler was sent at once in search of her.

III.

What the Maid Saw.

The butler returned presently supporting the maid, who seemed to be in a state of collapse, weeping hysterically. She had been hiding in a closet in her mistress' room, and being neither mentally nor physically strong, the tragedy had driven her to the verge of insanity.

She gave a piece of evidence, however, that sent everyone present into consternation.

"I saw him do it—I saw him do it," she wailed, her face buried in her hands and a handkerchief.

I went over to the maid and took her out of the butler's care; sat her down and talked gently and soothingly to her. I soon got her to look at me and she gained confidence, and stopped weeping somewhat, though she was still shaken with convulsive sobs.

"Saw him do what?" I asked.

"Put it in the water—it was poison—I told Miss Allibone—she tried—to warn her father—now she's d-e-a-d!"

She broke off into a despairing wail as the thought came to her that her mistress was dead.

"How did it occur?" I urged. "When did you see this? Who did it?"

The last question seemed to nerve her. She took her hands from her face and leapt to her feet.

"He!" she screamed, pointing an accusing finger at Mr. Carrewe.

He must have been a clever scoundrel in a way, for he never turned a hair.

"Oh, I say, uncle, this won't do," he said rising, and addressing Mr. Allibone. "The girl has gone daft."

"Certainly, this is too absurd," exclaimed Mr. Allibone. "Take the girl away——"

"Pardon me, Mr. Allibone," I interrupted, "we must hear what the girl has to say."

I stood beside her now, supporting her with an arm about her waist.

"Try and tell us what you know from the beginning," I asked her quietly.

"I was in there," pointing to the door of an adjoining apartment, "I happened to look in the mirror and could see Mr. Carrewe in here. His face was terrible, pale and frightened, and he looked around the room as though afraid someone was watching him.

"Then I saw him put something from a bottle in the glass jug of drinking water. I should not have thought anything of this if he had not looked so scared.

"Mistress had gone out for her morning constitutional, and I was dreadfully worried till she came back. I wanted to tell her what I had seen. When I heard the front door close and knew she had returned, I rose and would have rushed to her, but I could not keep my feet, and I fell in a faint. She found me so in her room, and as soon as I was brought to, I told her. She screamed and ran downstairs to warn her father, you know what happened then."

The telling of her story had quieted her nerves somewhat.

She stared at the man she accused.

"This evidence will necessitate your being searched, Mr. Carrewe," said Inspector Quaritch. "Mr. Nicholls, will you perform the duty?"

"He!" she screamed, pointing an accusing finger at Mr. Carrewe.

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I deposited the maid in the chair and stepped forward.

"But that is all rubbish," interposed Mr. Allibone. "I have drunk of the water and it is quite harmless. The girl must be under a delusion."

"Never mind, uncle," said Mr. Carrewe, "let them proceed with the search. What's more I'll have some of this poisoned water myself."

He filled a glass and drank it off and a part of another glass.

Some of the servants present no doubt expected him to drop dead where he stood. But he only smiled grimly, and allowed me to proceed with the search.

It came to me while doing this that there was a mystery here that would baffle all solution so slender were the clues, and then there occurred, like a flash, the memory of that pitiable frightened creature I had left in his room in Westminster Bridge Road.

"Do you happen to know a Mr. Pollidge?" I asked casually, as I had about finished the search.

"Never heard the name," he replied.

But I had fixed my eye upon him too attentively, and I detected a quiver of the eyelid and the faintest change of expression which would have been invisible had I stood five yards from him, and they aroused my suspicions.

I informed Inspector Quaritch in a few whispered words of the conclusions I had formed.

He did not think there was any basis for them, but as I seemed convinced, and there was a bare possibility of turning up a valuable bit of evidence, he agreed that I should go and fetch this man while he finished the examination of those present.

Little did I dream of the tragic *dénouement* that was to follow. I don't know that I deserve any special credit for this, but if it had not been for my meeting that frightened man in the house I was about to leave earlier in the day, it is safe to say that this West End Mystery would very likely have remained one of the unsolved crimes of this great city.

Within the hour I was back again in a cab with my man beside me. I had no difficulty in getting him to come with me, but when he saw we were in Russell Square he became excitable, and when we stopped in front of Mr. Allibone's house he was unmanageable, and I had to get assistance to force him into the house. His actions confirmed my suspicions. When he was led into the room and his eyes fell on Mr. Carrewe he was all of a tremble.

"That's him," he cried, "he said he'd do it!"

Mr. Carrewe never winced despite this direct charge.

"Why do you bring this man here? I never saw him before," he said.

"It's a lie," exclaimed the new witness. "Ask him," pointing to Mr. Allibone, "if he knows me."

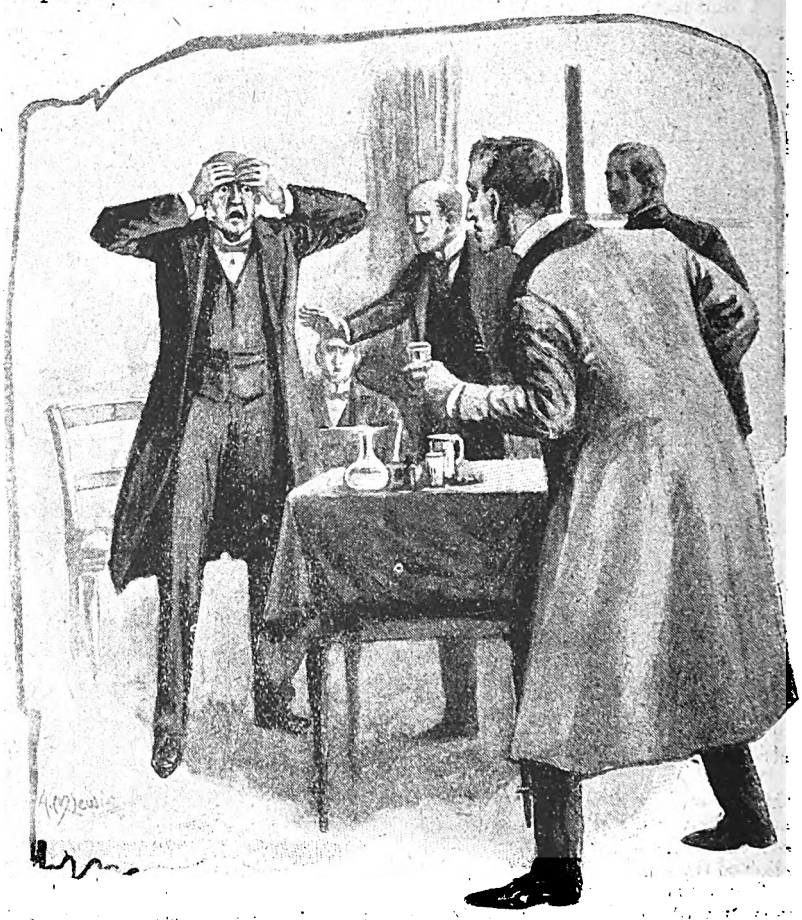
Mr. Allibone reluctantly confessed that he had submitted to a systematic blackmailing by this man for the past year, but he added that that did not imply that his nephew knew the wretch.

"Don't it!" cried the weak creature. "He put me up to it. He took half the rhino, and last night he told me he was going to finish you; that there was more in you dead than alive!"

"Impossible!" ejaculated Mr. Allibone.

There was nothing at all impossible in it to me, and I went to the fireplace and began raking among the ash.

"The evidence, however, is sufficient to warrant the arrest of Mr. Carrewe," said Inspector Quaritch, dismissing all the servants.



Mr. Allibone was staring as though his eyes would start from their sockets.

Raking at the coals in the fire I probed out some bits of ash that were welded together with what looked very much like glass. Next I found the neck of the bottle with the glass stopper still in it; as it was still hot, I arose and directed the attention of Mr. Allibone, Mr. Carrewe and the Inspector to what I had discovered.

When it had cooled somewhat, I picked it up with my handkerchief. It was a peculiar bottle of foreign make. I had the butler called again and sent him for a special drug at the chemist's. Then I took what remained of the water in the jug and glass.

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"I have made a considerable study of poisons," I explained. "I will tell you in a few minutes whether this water is poisoned and what it contains."

The man Carrewe still maintained a stolid indifference. On Mr. Allibone, however, the scene was telling terribly. His face was becoming haggard.

"Henry, Henry, say something," he pleaded. "Henry deny all this."

He sank into a chair, helpless.

The butler returned with the drug he had purchased for me, and I prepared for the experiment I was about to make.

I kept to the far side of the table for I could see that although Mr. Carrewe controlled himself admirably, there was a gleam in his eye as though he would have liked to leap upon me and spill that water, which if it contained the poison I thought it did, would prove such damning evidence against him.

The family physician, Dr. Hale, who was present, and had taken but slight part in the proceedings save to answer such questions as were put to him, now showed the greatest interest in what I was about to do.

I called for a little fresh water and a glass.

"I will take first this water which has just been brought to me," I said, "and dropping some of this fluid into it will assure you that it will remain unchanged in colour."

Sixty minims had fallen into the water and it remained unaltered.

"I will take a glass half-full from this pitcher. I must tell you," I explained slowly, "what I expect, and it will serve as an added proof if I am correct. This bottle stopper I recognise as part of a bottle in which very rare and deadly drugs are sometimes put in India. You will see almost its counterpart at the British Museum. There is a deadly drug the natives obtain from a species of adder. It can be administered internally and it takes from a month to six months to bring about death, but there is no tracing the cause. If, however, it gets into the blood or touches an open wound it brings death almost instantaneously by paralysing the heart.

"Thus a man could drink great quantities of this safely enough, for he could a few hours afterwards or next day apply an antidote." Here I looked steadily at Mr. Carrewe.

"You said, I believe," I remarked to Dr. Hale, "that there was a slight abrasion beside the ear, sustained most likely by Miss Allibone in falling? Just so. You see the water that was dashed on her face would have allowed this poison to get into her blood."

I was exasperatingly deliberate, I know, but I felt very sure of my point. I uncorked the little phial and held it over the glass that was half-full of water from the pitcher. Mr. Allibone leant forward in his chair.

"If I am right in my surmise the fluid I am about to drop in will turn this water a pale violet," I said.

And then one, two, three, I began to drop it in minims into the glass. Twenty had fallen and no change had come and I could see a leer of malice and triumph in the eyes of Mr. Carrewe. Then twenty-one, twenty-two—I was not at all daunted. I knew that according to the quantity of the poison placed in the water, it would require just so many minims to bring about the change.

At the twenty-fourth drop the water changed almost instantly to a pale purple as I had predicted. I glanced hastily at each face present.

Then a cry of anguish rang out that brought me to my feet like lightning.

"Heavens, Nicholls, what have you done?" Mr. Allibone was staring as though his eyes would start from their sockets. "You make me my child's murderer. It was I—who dashed that water in her face! My girl—my—poor—girl—I—I—" his hand went to his throat, before any one could catch him he was lying in a heap upon the floor.

Dr. Hale did all he could for him on the instant, but it was little that could be done for the poor old man, heart-broken and conscience-stricken as he was.

He lingered a month and died, recovering consciousness for just sufficient length of time to make a new will and destroy the old one in which his nephew had been remembered to the tune of one hundred thousand pounds.

I had the satisfaction of taking Mr. Henry Carrewe into custody there and then, and putting him in safe keeping. Clever as he undoubtedly was in crooked work, he was not clever enough to choose equally clever men to carry out his dirty work.

At the trial Mr. Pollidge, his tool, showed that the nephew had deliberately led his uncle into compromising situations and then levied a heavy blackmail by means of Mr. Pollidge. This had been enough for a time, but so easy is it to fall into evil ways, after the first few steps, that the knowledge that a hundred thousand pounds awaited him when his uncle died, aroused in him no sense of gratitude, but only the fiendish desire to help him shuffle off this mortal coil.

He went up for life for it, and few cases have given me so much satisfaction as this, for I know that the man is still expiating his crimes at the hardest kind of labour in Portland Prison.

I took up my work of tracing the rogues whom I had been watching in the house in Westminster Bridge Road, and was soon rewarded with an adventure, which if not so tragic was very exciting, but that of course is another story.

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The Lost Rose.

WITH many wild whoops, much leaping and tumbling, the children hurried out of the weather-beaten school-house and took their several ways toward their homes in the sparsely-settled neighbourhood.

A moment later Millie Forrest, the teacher, came out and hurrying across the playground turned into the long lane, flanked by "stake and rider" fences, overrun here and there with wild morning-glory vines.

Small, slender, with big brown eyes, an oval face with irregular features, the young "teacher" was not what one would call pretty, but there was a piquant arch to the red lips, and the heavy mass of nut-brown hair that overhung her brows was a glory in itself sufficient to have awakened envy.

She walked rapidly along the lane and turned through a gate into a grove of trees on the rise. Following a winding path crossed by deep shadows cast from the trees by the declining sun, she was halfway through the wood when Edgar Sommers, a neighbour's son, came from a clump of bushes and, with a show of bashfulness, joined her.

"Evening, Millie," he said, after an embarrassing silence. "Had a good day at school?"

"Much the same as all other days," replied the girl with a defiant lifting of her head. "I am tired of it all. I wonder if everyone finds life such a dreary round? Sometimes I wish I might fall into the old mill-pond yonder with no one near to rescue me."

The young man's eyes grew moist and his lip trembled perceptibly.

"Is it so dull and stupid for you here, Millie?" he said slowly. "I—I wish I might do something to make things brighter and—sweeter for you."

The girl turned her face away that he might not see the sudden light that came into her eyes and the flush that coloured her brown cheek.

"I'm rough and awkward," he continued, lengthening his stride to keep up with the girl's quickening pace, "not worthy of you in any way; Millie, Millie—I love you, love you more than my life, more than a thousand lives. If you would only give me the right, I would do as much as any man could do to make you happy."

She was going forward rapidly, nervously, her head lifted, and a look of gladness in her eyes,

Had he seen it he would have taken her in his arms, then and there, and settled the question. But he did not see it and her silence was like death to his hopes.

A wild rose nodding and blushing beside the patch caught his eye, and stooping, he plucked it from the bush.

"See, Millie, the last of the season; let the flower plead for me. I won't ask you to decide now, but you are going to the dance over at Major Barlow's to-night. If you think you could trust me and let me love and care for you, wear it in your hair."

He held out the rose to her and she took it demurely from his big, brown fingers.

"If you wear the flower to-night, you will make me the happiest man in the world," he said in a half-whisper. "If you don't, you will break my heart."

He stood for a moment gazing with longing eyes upon the slender figure of the girl going on, with the warm sunlight turning her bronze hair to gold. Then he went back heavily along the path and passed through the meadow lands lying beyond the grove and by the old water-mill in the ravine.

As he passed the mill he saw Frisbie, the new miller from the city, standing in the door, his curling hair white with flour dust.

Edgar could not but acknowledge him a handsome fellow, and remembering how often he had been a visitor at the Forrest home since he came to the neighbourhood, he answered the miller's hearty greeting gruffly and passed on.

Millie went through the woods softly humming:

"Give me a kiss, that going home,
My feet may walk on air."

She dressed herself with unusual care for the evening and when she was ready put the wild rose in her hair. The dance was to be only a neighbourly party, and she would go over early and be with the Barlow girls when the others came.

As she tripped into the little sitting room she met her mother going with the pitcher for water. Millie took the vessel from her mother and ran lightly down the slope. Stooping she dipped the pitcher into the spring. In the dusk the clear, undisturbed waters shone like silver. As she lifted the full pitcher and turned to retrace her steps the rose slipped from her hair and falling into the spring brook was carried swiftly out of sight. The happy girl did not miss the pretty token until well on her way to Major Barlow's.

It was too late then to go back to look for it and she went on framing many pretty excuses for not having

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the rose in her hair to be seen when Edgar should come.

It was nearly nine o'clock and the full moon was shining when Edgar Sommers, on his way to the dance, reached the narrow foot-bridge that crossed the spring brook. He was anxious and despondent. His great love made him timid and cast a halo about the object of his affection. It seemed impossible that she should care for him. He stood for a moment on the bridge looking down into the moonlit water.

A bright object dancing on the ripples caught his eye. It whirled over the tiny rapids and lodged against the roots of a willow. Edgar sprang over the low rail of the bridge and snatched from the water the rose he had given Millie a few hours before. Here, then, was her answer to his pleading.

She had thrown it away, and the spring brook brought it to save him the humiliation of meeting a more direct refusal from her lips.

He was dumb with the sudden overthrow of his hopes and walked on aimlessly, the rose crushed in his hand.

Suddenly the strain of a violin playing the "Blue Danube" fell on his ears. He had come unconsciously to where she was.

He would have turned back, but could not. A desire to look upon her face once more before he went away forever drew him on until he stood in the shadow of a vine that ran over the doorway of the Barlow home.

The door was open and he saw the gay couples floating about the big dining-room. Millie was dancing with the new miller, and they glided on to the rise and fall of the music, the handsomest couple in the room. How Edgar hated the man! He longed to stretch out his hand, take the white throat of his rival between his strong fingers and crush out his life. It was for this unknown, smooth-voiced stranger that she had thrown him over.

But she did not love him, so what matter who claimed her. He turned away and was soon hidden in the shadow of the woods that skirted the stream below the house.

Millie waited impatiently for Edgar's coming. She had determined to go to him as soon as he arrived and tell him of the loss of the rose and acknowledge her intention to have worn it.

He would forgive her seeming carelessness when he knew she loved him; she felt sure of that.

But as the hours wore on and he did not come, she became restive and frightened. What could have happened to detain him.

At last the people prepared to go home and the miller offered to escort her across the fields. She would have refused him, but there was no good excuse. There was no one else to accompany her, and so the two went out across the meadows. He gay and confident, she sad and apprehensive. As they were going over the rustic bridge where Edgar had found the rose, the young man suddenly threw his arm about Millie's waist, and, drawing her close, cried: "Toll, little one, that is the country custom, isn't it? Come, give me a kiss for toll."

"Let me go," she cried, and struggled to free herself.

"Not until I have taken toll," he replied, bending over her. "It is my right, you know."

Before the now frightened girl could cry out there was a quick step on the bridge, and a big, brown hand fell on the shoulder of the young miller, and he turned to face the tall young farmer. The girl ran to the end of the bridge and stood trembling with fright.

The two men faced each other on the narrow bridge. The moon, far down in the west, cast a mellow light on the scene.

Edgar was the first to speak, and his voice had in it the ring of steel.

"Millie," said he, "has this—fellow the right to offer to kiss you?"

"You know he hasn't." She stood straight now, and her brown eyes flashed, then her manner suddenly changed. "Don't strike him, Edgar. Let him go. You are to blame. If you had come as you promised this would not have happened."

"And the rose," he said, "I found it here in the brook."

"It was in my hair when I left home. Oh, Edgar, I understand; you—you thought I threw it away."

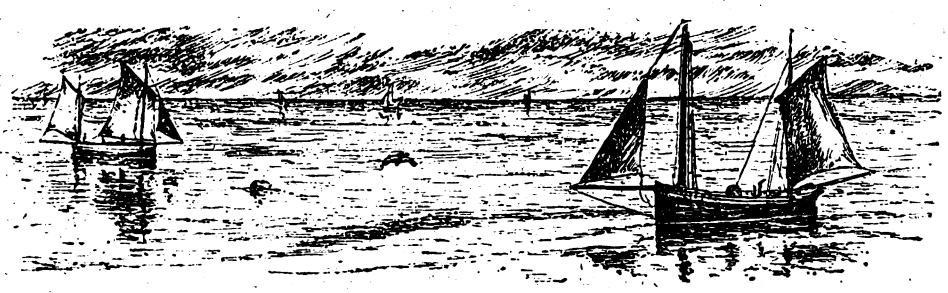
She was close by his side now.

"And you didn't?"

"I would have sacrificed my life first."

"Thank Heaven."

And when they looked again they were alone.



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LANGLEY'S BURGLAR.

HE was a clean, venerable-looking old fellow, with a snowy white tuft of hair on his chin and a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles astride of a nose that was coloured just a trifle deeper than the rest of his face. His expression was mild and benevolent. A folded rule was sticking out of his waistcoat pocket, and a thick, stubby pencil protruded from his ear, and he carried a hammer.

"Good-morning, marm," he said, as Mrs. Langley opened the kitchen door. "I'm the carpenter."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Langley, vaguely.

"The agent sent me to look at the windows and see what was wanted for them," pursued the old man.

"Not our windows, surely," said Mrs. Langley. "There's nothing in the world the matter with them. There must be some mistake."

"It's the casings I want to look at," explained the carpenter. "I want to see whether the weather stripping is set tight or if it wants new anywhere. We're going to have a cold winter, once it starts, and we don't want to have you freezing to death."

He looked so particularly benevolent as he said this that Mrs. Langley felt quite grateful. She invited him in and he inspected the kitchen windows, the bedroom and parlour windows, and even the transoms. He did everything in a very conscientious, painstaking fashion, and it was nearly half-an-hour before he folded up his rule and took up his hat to go.

"There ain't really much to do," he said, with a modest air of deprecating his efforts in Mrs. Langley's behalf in order to stem an anticipated flood of thanks. "I suppose there's about an hour's work altogether. That there door is sprung badly, and I might as well put that right with the rest. Let the tail go with the hide—hat's what I say. There's no use spoiling the ship to save a pot of pitch. He didn't tell me to put the door right, but I ain't a man who likes to do things by halves."

Mrs. Langley commended these statements.

"Now, marm, if you'll let me know what day to come I'll fix it so's I won't have to bother you when it's not convenient," concluded the old man. "I don't like to come in with my tools messing up a house when a lady ain't expectin' me. How'm I goin' to know but she's got company, or something of that sort?"

Mrs. Langley said he was the most considerate man she ever saw.

Langley was suspicious from the start.

"Told you the agent sent him round, did he?" he asked. "That does settle it! The agent! Sent a carpenter round! Unsolicited—actuated by a kind concern for our comfort! I didn't go down on my knees half-a-dozen times to implore him to have those windows altered. I didn't finally take a big stick and go round to his office and make threatening demonstrations. No, he thought some of us might sit in a draught and catch cold, so he sent a man to do the work. That's the worst I ever heard."

"Sounds rather fishy," said Plummer, who was over for the evening.

"What would the man want to come round for if he wasn't sent?" asked Mrs. Langley. "He said the agent sent him, most distinctly and positively. He wouldn't say a thing like that and go to all that trouble unless it was so."

"What have you missed since he went away?" asked Plummer.

"What have I——? Why you don't mean——? No, that would be absurd. He couldn't have taken anything without my seeing him. I was with him the whole time. Besides, he wasn't at all that kind of a man."

"Do you mean that he didn't look like a burglar? That don't signify anything."

"I think I can tell a burglar when I see one," said Mrs. Langley, indignantly. "This man was as nice and pleasant and chatty as he could be."

"Some of the most confirmed and inveterate burglars I have known have been pleasant, chatty men," remarked Langley.

"'When the enterprising burglar's not a-burgling he loves to lie a-basking in the sun,'" quoted Plummer.

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"Did he wipe his feet on the mat when he came in?" inquired Langley.

"I think you are both of you absurd," said his wife. "If he had been a burglar why wouldn't he have stolen something while he was in the house? Another thing, he wouldn't have spoken about the broken fastening on the pantry window and said he would bring a new one."

"That's easily explained," remarked Langley. "He probably thought there was a chance that we would put on a new fastening ourselves if he didn't say that he would. He wanted to make sure of an opening."

"An opening for a person of experience," added Plummer.

"That's the idea exactly, I think we can make up our minds that we are going to have what they call a nocturnal visitor. I distrust these philanthropic persons with silvery whiskers."

"Were there any valuables in sight, Mrs. Langley?" asked Plummer.

"There was my watch on the dressing-table and my bracelet and things, and there was baby's little silver mug and the cream jug and the rest of the things on the sideboard. I couldn't go round and gather up everything before I brought him in. I wouldn't have let him in at all if I hadn't known he was all right."

"How did you come to know he was all right?" asked Langley.

"Because I did," answered his wife, conclusively.

Langley, however, refused to be convinced. He felt rather nervous about leaving his wife alone the next morning, and borrowed Plummer's little 22-calibre revolver, which he wanted her to carry in her pocket.

His own pistol was a wide-muzzled, stubby affair, that held flat, squat cartridges calculated to stop an elephant in his rush.

Mrs. Langley said she thought she would manage to get along without any of those horrible things.

Later in the day Langley was inspired by the recollection that he paid taxes and was entitled to police protection. He thereupon called at the neighbouring police-station and informed the inspector of his fears.

That functionary seemed to take the same view of the matter as Langley did. He said he thought he recognised the description of the self-styled carpenter, whom he believed to be the leader of a dangerous gang. He assured Langley that he would have the house watched.

When Langley returned home that evening he saw a man strolling along on the side of the street and looking so supernaturally unconcerned and casual that anybody would have known he was a plain-clothes man on guard. This gave Langley a certain sense of security, but at the same time rendered him decidedly nervous. Plummer did not come round or Langley would have asked him to stay all night.

Langley told his wife what the police inspector had said. He was unwilling to alarm her, but he felt that what he called her "cock-sureness" needed some rebuke For some reason, however, she did not seem to be impressed, and she laughed at him in a particularly aggravating way, when he balanced a tea tray and a couple of flat irons against the pantry window.

It was about midnight when the trap was sprung. It went off with a crash, clatter and bang that made Langley sit bolt upright in bed, with his heart beating like a steam-hammer, before he quite realised what had happened. There was an instant of awful and profound stillness. Then Langley heard his wife's voice. She said:

"I thought that would happen. The cat has knocked down that arrangement of yours, William."

Langley deigned no reply, but lifted himself cautiously out of bed, and, groping for his revolver, found it and stole softly and fearfully down the noisily creaking stairs.

He reached the pantry at last and found his tray and flat irons on the floor. A cold current of air that instantly communicated its chill to his spinal column told him that the window was open. Slowly and cautiously he peered out.

A subdued cough came from the back yard, and Langley drew his head back with a suddenness that brought it into violent contact with one of the pantry shelves. He felt the bump later, but hardly noticed the shock at the time.

Reproaching himself for cowardice, he nerved himself for the effort, and, again looking out of the window, he called:

"Who's there?" the pulsations in his throat imparting a tremor to his voice.

"We're police-officers," came the reply, and two shadowy forms loomed up from the darkness. "Sorry we disturbed you, but we were trying the windows and knocked something over."

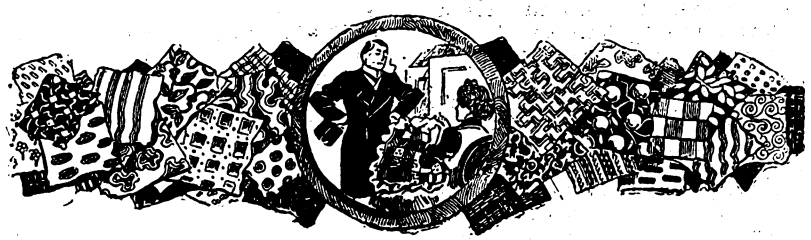
"I believe you did," said Langley bitterly.

"It wasn't anybody," said Langley returning to his room.

"What is it?" asked his wife, sleepily. "I wish you'd go to bed and stop prowling round, William. Of course there wasn't anybody. I knew that perfectly well."

"I'd like to know how you knew it," said Langley, cowering beneath the bedclothes and shivering.

"I'd have told you before if you hadn't been so smart about it," replied Mrs Langley. "I went round to the agent's this afternoon and he said he had sent the man round. He was just as nice—. Why William Langley, I'd be ashamed."



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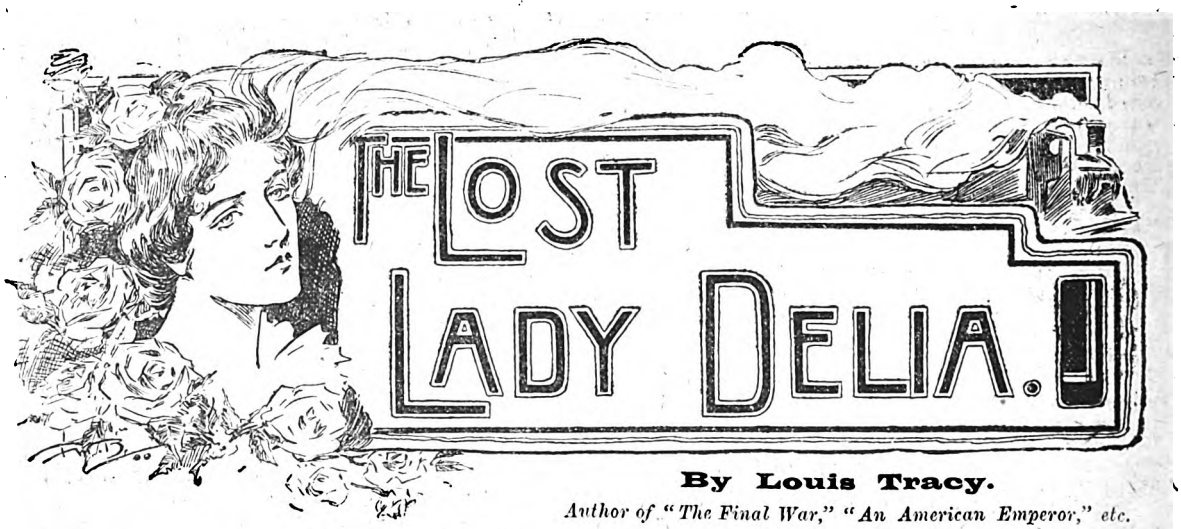

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

THIS TELLS THE STORY FROM THE START.

LADY DELIA LYLE leaves her house one foggy November afternoon saying she is going to see her sister at Richmond, but from that time she is not heard of.

Her husband, Sir Charles Lyle, puts the matter into the hands of detectives, Inspector Winter taking charge of the case.

Reginald Brett, a barrister friend of the Lyles, also promises to do all he can, and he finds out that Lady Delia, on the night of her disappearance, instead of going to Richmond, alighted at Sloane Square, and went to a block of flats called Raleigh Mansions.

Towards the end of the month the body of a woman, evidently murdered, is found wedged beneath a drain-pipe in the Thames at Putney, and, though Sir Charles does not identify the body, Brett imagines it to be that of Lady Delia. Shortly after this discovery Lady Delia's maid, Jane Harding, disappears. She is afterwards found to have gone on the stage.

Brett now starts investigations at Raleigh Mansions, and he fixes on two residents there as being likely to have been connected with Lady Delia. These are a Mr. Sydney H. Pyne, who is not at present in residence, and a Mrs. Hilmer, whom he finds to be Pyne's sister.

It had transpired that Pyne had gone to Monte Carlo, and thither Brett goes, and he discovers that though letters are addressed to Pyne at the Hotel du Cercle, he is not known there.

During his stay at Monte Carlo Brett becomes acquainted with an Englishman, named Albert Mensmore, whom he helps out of some money difficulties, but he does not discover anything about Pyne.

After his return Brett finds out that Sir Charles Lyle knows Albert Mensmore, but in what connection does not transpire.

A few days later Brett goes into the City, to the office of Dodge and Co., with whom he had had some speculative dealings, and from remarks made by Mr. Dodge, he thinks that Pyne and Mensmore must be one and the same man. In the evening Brett and Winter go to Raleigh Mansions and search the flat occupied by Pyne. Brett finds that a piece of one of the fire-dogs is missing, and that it exactly corresponds with the piece of iron which was found imbedded in the head of the body found at Putney.

It is shown by this time that Mensmore (who is at Genoa) had previously adopted the name of Pyne. The real Pyne (his mining partner) writes him that their property is likely to bring them much wealth.

Pyne arrives in England and takes Mensmore's flat, where the detectives surprise him. Brett partially explains the situation, and has a talk with Pyne.

CHAPTER XXII. *(continued).*

"Oh, just that Mensmore had acted for me. The man seemed a bit puzzled, but he didn't kick when I offered to pay up the rent owing since Christmas, and another quarter in advance."

"I don't suppose he did. The rent was due, then?"

"Yes. It seems that Mensmore, writing in my name, sent a letter from Monte Carlo a month ago saying he would return about this time and settle up."

"Thus proving his intention all along to come back to London. It is a queer muddle, Mr. Pyne, is it not?"

"Very, but you will pardon me as an outsider saying one thing—you all appear to have overlooked a clear trail."

"And what is that?"

"What about Mrs. Hilmer? Who is she? Who are her friends? Who maintains her in such style? Bertie was with me four years and never mentioned her. She could not have been rich by inheritance, as it was on account of their father going broke that Mensmore had to leave the Army and come out to the States. It strikes me, Mr. Brett, that the woman knows more about this affair than the man."

"You may be right. But do not forget the absolute proofs we possess that the crime occurred in Mensmore's chambers, and the extraordinary coincidence that he left England immediately afterwards."

"I am not forgetting anything. These facts tell both ways. Just because he quitted the country at the time somebody may have tried to throw the blame on him."

The theory was plausible, though Brett could not accept it. Nevertheless, after Pyne had taken his departure he could not help thinking about his references to Mrs. Hilmer. That there was force in them he could not deny, and with the admission came the unpleasant thought that perhaps he, Brett, was in some sense responsible for the neglect to clear up her antecedents.

However, a few hours might explain much.

With unwonted impatience the barrister awaited the coming of night. He tried every expedient to kill time, and found each operation tedious.

He dined early, and as half-past seven came and passed he wondered why the detective did not appear.

But his doubts on this point did not last long.

"Winter has gone to Charing Cross to make sure of their arrival," he said to himself.

At ten minutes to eight the detective came in hurriedly to say: "They will be here directly. A servant has taken their luggage to Mrs. Hilmer's place, and they are evidently driving straight here after taking some refreshment at the station."

"Have you no faith in human nature, Mr. Winter? Could you not trust their words?"

"Well, sir, my experience of human nature is that you can very seldom trust anybody's word."

At last Smith announced "Mrs. Hilmer and Mr. Mensmore."

When they entered Brett was for the moment at a loss to know exactly how to receive them.

But Mrs. Hilmer settled the matter by coming with a quiet "Good evening," and seating herself, and Mensmore stood near the door, very pale and stern-looking.

"It appears, Mr. Brett," he said, "that we met in Monte Carlo under false pretences. You were, it seems, a detective

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on the track of a murderer, and you were good enough to believe that I was the person you sought. It would have saved some misconception on my part had you explained our *roles* earlier. However, I am here to meet the charge."

Reggie was not unprepared for this attitude on Mensmore's part. But he was determined that it should not continue if he could help it.

"When we parted at Monte Carlo, Mensmore," he said, "we parted as friends."

"Yes."

"Then tell me what has happened since to cause this obvious change in your opinion of me."

"Is it not true that you suspect me of murdering Lady Delia Lyle?"

"No."

"But why has my sister been told that I ran serious risk of being apprehended on that count?"

"Because we certainly did suspect a mysterious personage who called himself Sydney H. Pyne, and whose behaviour was so unaccountable that the authorities required a reasonable explanation of it."

"Do I understand, Brett, that we meet with no more suspicion between us than when we last saw each other?"

"Most certainly."

"Then I ask your pardon for my manner and my words. I have suffered keenly during the last three days from this cruel thought. Let us shake hands on it."

As their hands met they both heard Mrs. Hilmer stifle a sob. Mensmore turned to her.

"Now, Gwen," he said, "don't be foolish. We will soon clear up this miserable business. So far as we are concerned all we need do is to tell the truth and fear nobody."

"That's it," said Winter. "If you adopt that course the matter will soon be ended."

Mensmore turned to the speaker. He guessed his identity, but Brett introduced the detective by name.

"Well," said Mensmore, "I have come here to answer questions. What is it you want to know?"

Mr. Winter glanced at the barrister, and Reggie explained:

"I have, as you may already realise, taken more than a passive interest in this inquiry, so the questioning largely devolves on me. First, tell me why you adopted the name of Pyne?"

"Simple enough, though stupid, I now admit. When I returned from the States I was very hard up, but managed to pick up a subsistence by writing for the sporting press, and occasionally backing horses. But I knew that this could not last, so I tried to get some financial interests in the City. In doing so I made the acquaintance of a man named Dodge, and committed myself to the underwriting of a new venture named the Springbok Mine. This fell through at the time, and with this collapse came other demands. I hate being worried with creditors, so when my sister offered to take and furnish a flat for me, near her own, I thought I would live quietly for a time and conceal my name so as to have peace there at any rate. Therefore, I took the name of a friend in America, little thinking that I should land both him and myself into such trouble by doing it. That is the explanation. By the way, what has happened to Pyne?"

"He is all right. He expects to see you to-night. You know Sir Charles Lyle, do you not?"

"Yes."

"Intimately?"

"Well, no, not exactly. He and I were at school together at Brighton, at Childe's place."

"At Brighton?"

"Yes. I was a little chap when Lyle was a senior. After he left the headmaster changed the school to a place called Seton Lodge, at Putney, on account of cramming operations for Army exams."

"Then you were at Putney?"

"Yes, for two years."

"And Lyle was not?"

"No; that I am sure of."

"Have you and Sir Charles been friendly since?"

Mensmore's face hardened somewhat as he answered: "I have seen very little of him, and have hardly ever spoken to him."

"Why? Did you quarrel?"

"N-no, but we just did not happen to meet. Bear in mind I was in business some years ago, and I am not yet thirty."

"Did you know Lady Delia?"

"I have never, to my knowledge, seen her."

"How, then, can you account for the fact that she visited your flat at Raleigh Mansions on November 6?"

"I say that such a statement is mere nonsense."

"But if it can be proved?"

"It cannot."

"I assure you, on my honour, that it can."

"But look here, Brett. Why should she come to see me? I question greatly if she knew of my existence."

"Nevertheless, it is the fact."

"I can only tell you it is not. I left London on November 8, and on the two previous evenings I dined alone. Mrs. Robinson, my housekeeper, can tell you that not another soul entered my flat for a week prior to my departure, except my sister and—and—I had forgotten—some workmen."

"Some workmen?"

"Yes; some fellows from a furniture warehouse."

"What were they doing?"

"Well, don't you see, I told you I was not well off, and my sister furnished my flat for me, in August last that was, but the drawing-room was left bare for a time. Just before I left for France she decided to refurnish her drawing-room, and she gave me the whole fit-out. The things were brought in by the men who came with her purchases."

At this astounding statement Brett and Winter were utterly taken aback. It was with difficulty that the barrister enunciated his next words clearly.

"Can you tell me with quite absolute certainty, the date of this change of the furniture?"

"Oh, yes. It was the day before I started for the Riviera that must have been November 7th."

"Are you positive of this?"

"Undoubtedly. Is it a matter of importance? Gwen, you know all about it. Besides, the bills for your new furniture will show the date of delivery, and it was the same day."

Mrs. Hilmer's face was hidden by her veil, but she nodded silently.

Three people in the room knew the terrible significance of Mensmore's straightforward words; but as yet he was personally unaware of the direction towards which the investigation now tended.

"Let us analyse the matter carefully," said Brett, who had recovered his self-possession, though he was almost terrified at the possibilities of the situation. "Did the whole of the contents of your drawing-room come from your sister's flat?"

"Every stick. There was nothing there before but the bare boards."

"Do you remember a handsome ornamental fender being amongst these articles?"

"Perfectly. My housekeeper said the men broke it during the transit. They denied this, and looked for the piece chipped off, but could not find it. She told me about it that night."

"Did you mention it to Mrs. Hilmer?"

"No. To tell the honest truth, Gwen and I had quarrelled a couple of days before. That is to say, we disagreed seriously about a certain matter, and it was this which led to my making off to Monte Carlo. Therefore it was hardly likely I should mention such a trivial matter to her."

"May I ask what you quarrelled about?"

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"I have told her since that it ought to be made known, but she has implored me not to reveal it, so I cannot. But she will tell you herself that we agreed I should be at liberty to make this guarded explanation."

Brett and the detective again exchanged glances of wondering comprehension.

"I do not think we need question Mr. Mensmore further," said the barrister to Winter.

"No," was the reply. "The matter is clear enough. Mrs. Hillmer must tell us how that furniture came to be transferred from her premises on the morning of the 7th."

"If she chooses."

Brett's tone was sad, and its ominous significance was not lost on his hearers.

Mrs. Hillmer raised her veil. Her face was deathly pale and tense in its fixed agony. But in her eyes was a light which gave a curious aspect of resolve to her otherwise painful aspect of utter grief.

"I do not choose," she said quietly, looking, not at Brett or the detective, but at her brother.

For a little while no one spoke. Mensmore at last broke out eagerly:

"Don't act absurdly, Gwen. I cannot even guess where all this talk about the furniture is leading us, but I do know that you are as innocent of any complicity in Lady Delia's death as I am, so it is better for you to help forward the inquiry than to retard it."

"I am not innocent," said Mrs. Hilmer, her words falling with painful distinctness upon the ears of the three men. "Heaven help me! I am responsible for it!"

Her brother started to his feet, and caught her by the shoulder.

"What folly is this?" he cried. "Do you know what you are saying?"

"Fully. My words are like sledge-hammers. I will for ever feel their weight. I tell you I am responsible for the death of Lady Delia Lyle."

"Then how did she die, Mrs. Hilmer?" said Brett, whose glance sought to read her soul.

"I do not know. I do not want to know. It matters little to me."

"In other words, you are assuming a responsibility you should not bear. You were not even aware of this poor lady's death until I told you. Why should you seek to avert suspicion from others merely because Lady Delia is shown to have met her death in your apartments?"

"But how is it shown?" interrupted Mensmore vehemently, for he was more disturbed by his sister's unaccountable attitude than he had ever been at the serious charge against himself.

"Easily enough," said Winter, feeling that he ought to have some share in the conversation. "A piece of the damaged fender placed in your rooms, Mr. Mensmore, was found in the murdered lady's head."

"Was it?" he cried. "Then, by Heaven, I refuse to see my sister sacrificed for anybody's sake. She has borne too long the whole burthen of misery and degradation. I tell you, Gwen, that if you do not save yourself I will save you against your will. That furniture came to my room because——"

"Bertie, I beseech you, for the sake of the woman you love, to spare me." Mrs. Hilmer flung herself on her knees before him and caught hold of his hands, whilst she burst into a storm of tears.

Mensmore was unnerved. He turned to Brett, and said:

"Help me in this miserable business, old chap. I don't know what to say or do; my sister had no more connection with Lady Delia's death than I had. This statement on her part is mere hysteria arising from other circumstances altogether."

"That I feel acutely," said the barrister. "Yet someone killed her, and, whatever the pain that may be caused, and whoever may suffer, I am determined that the truth shall come out."

"I tell you," wailed Mrs. Hilmer between her sobs, "that I must bear all the blame. Why do you hesitate? She was killed in my house, and I confess my guilt."

"This *is* a rum business," growled Mr. Winter aloud, but half-unconsciously.

At that moment the door opened unexpectedly, and Smith entered.

Before Brett had time to vociferate at his astounded servitor the man stuttered an excuse:

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, "but Sir Charles Lyle has called, and wants to know if you will be disengaged soon."

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Letter.

Quick on the heels of the footman's stammered explanation came the voice of Sir Charles himself:

"Sorry to disturb you, Brett, if you are busy, but I must see you for a moment on a matter of great importance."

There was that in his utterance which betokened great excitement. He was not visible to the occupants of the room, but during the audible silence that followed his words, they could hear him stamping about in the passage, impatiently awaiting Brett's presence.

Mrs. Hilmer quietly collapsed on the floor. She had fainted.

Brett rushed out, calling for Mrs. Smith, and responding to Sir Charles Lyle's proffered statement as to the reason for his presence by the startling cry:

"Wait a bit, Lyle. There's a lady in a faint inside. We must attend to her at once."

Mrs. Smith, fortunately, was at hand, and with the help of her ministrations, Mrs. Hilmer gradually regained her senses.

After a whispered colloquy with Winter, the barrister said to Mensmore:

"You must get your sister to her residence as quickly as possible. She is far too highly strung to bear any further questioning to-night. Perhaps to-morrow, when you and she have talked matters fully together, you may be able to send for us and clear up this wretched business."

For answer Mensmore silently pressed his hand. With the help of the housekeeper he led his sister from the room, passing Sir Charles Lyle in the hall. The baronet politely turned aside, and Mensmore did not look at him, being far too engrossed with his sister to pay heed to aught else at the moment. As for Mrs. Hilmer, she was in such a state of collapse as to be practically unconscious of her surroundings.

She managed to murmur at the door:

"Where are you taking me to, Bertie?"

"Home, dear."

"Home? Oh, thank Heaven!"

They all heard her, and even the detective was constrained to say:

"Poor thing, she needn't have been afraid. She is suffering for someone else."

Sir Charles Lyle took Brett's arm.

"What on earth is going on?" he said.

"Merely a foolish woman worrying herself about others," replied Brett, grimly.

"But those people were my old friends, Mensmore and his sister?"

"Yes."

"What are they doing here?"

"Mensmore has been brought back to London by Mrs. Hilmer to face the allegations made against him with regard to your wife's disappearance. They came here by their own appointment, and——"

"Did I not tell you that this charge against Mensmore was wild folly on the face of it?"

"So it seems, when we have just discovered that your wife was killed in his sister's house, and then Mrs. Hilmer persists in declaring that she was responsible for the crime."

(*Continued on page 286.*)

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A Cluster of Fruit Farms.

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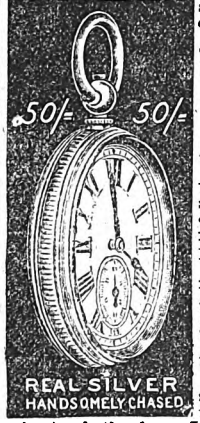

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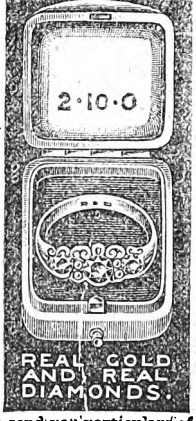

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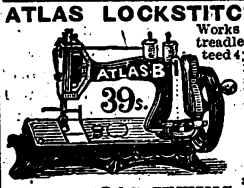

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"Look here, Brett. Don't you go and lose your head like everybody else mixed up in this wretched business. My wife is not dead."

"What!" The cry was a double one, for both Brett and Winter gave simultaneous utterance to their amazement.

"It is true. She is alive all the time. I have had a letter from her."

"A letter. Surely, Lyle——"

"I am neither mad nor drunk. It reached me by this morning's post. I came here with it as fast as I could travel. I have been in the train all day, and am nearly fainting from hunger."

"Where is it?" cried Winter. "Is it genuine?"

"I could swear to her writing amidst a thousand letters. Here it is. I have brought some old correspondence of hers for the purpose of comparison, as I could hardly believe my eyes when I first received it."

Brett was so dumfounded at this remarkable development that he could but mutely take the document produced by the baronet and read it.

He himself recognised Lady Delia's handwriting, which he had often seen—a clear, bold, well-defined script, more like the caligraphy of a banker than of a fashionable lady.

The letter was dated "February 1st," bore no other superscription, and read as follows:

My Dear Charles,—I have just seen in the newspapers the announcement of my death, and the theories set on foot to account for my disappearance on November 6th. This seems to convey to me the strange fact that you have not received the explanation I sent you of my reasons for leaving London so suddenly. Otherwise you must have kept your own counsel very closely. However, I do not now desire to reopen the question of motive; let it suffice to say that no one save myself was responsible for my disappearance, and that neither you nor anyone acquainted with me will ever see me again. Do not search for me; it will be time wasted. If you have legal proof of my death and wish to marry again, be satisfied. Tear up this letter and forget it. I am dead—to you and to the world. You can neither refuse to accept the genuineness of this letter nor trace me by reason of it, as I have taken such precautions that the latter course will be impossible. Let me repeat—forget me.

Delia.

The barrister carefully refolded the sheet after scrutinising the water-mark against the light, and noting that the paper was British made; he then examined the envelope. The obliterating post-mark was "London, February 4, 9 p.m., West Strand." The office of delivery was "Wensley, February 6."

"Posted at the West Strand Post Office on Saturday night," he said. "Detained in London all Sunday, and delivered to you this morning in the north."

"Exactly."

"It was written three days earlier, if the date be accurate. So the writer is somewhere in Europe."

"That's how I take it," said Sir Charles.

"Unless the whole thing is a fraud."

"How can it be a fraud? I am sure as to the handwriting. Why, even you yourself, Brett, must have a good recollection of my wife's style."

"Undoubtedly. No man born could swear that this was not Lady Delia's production."

"Well, what are we to do?"

"And what did Mrs. Hilmer mean by kicking up that fuss when we spoke to her?" interpolated Winter. "I'll take my oath that some one was killed in her house, else how comes it that a woman found in the Thames at Putney is carrying about in her head some of Mrs. Hilmer's ironwork? I wish she hadn't fainted just now. Why, she said herself that she was the cause of Lady Delia's death, and here Lady Delia writes to say she is alive. This business is beyond me, but Mrs. Hilmer has got to explain a good deal yet before I am done with her."

The detective's wrath at this check in the hunt for a criminal did not appeal to Sir Charles Lyle. "You can please yourself, Mr. Winter, of course," he said coldly; "but so far as I am concerned, I will respect my wife's wishes, and let the matter rest where it is."

"My dear Lyle," said the barrister, "such a course is impossible. Assuming that her ladyship is really alive, why did she leave you?"

"How can I tell? She herself refuses to give a reason. She apparently stated one in a letter which never reached me, as you know. She has selfishly caused me a world of suffering and misery for three long months. I refuse to be plagued in the matter any further." Sir Charles was excited and angry. He was in bitter revolt against circumstances.

"Do you intend to show this letter to Lady Delia's relatives?" said Brett, at a loss for the time, to discuss the situation coherently.

"I do not know. What would you advise? I trust fully to your judgment. But is it not better to obey her wishes?—to forget, as she puts it?"

"We must decide nothing hastily. I am perplexed beyond endurance by this business. There is so much that is wildly impossible in its irreconcilable features. I must have time. Will you give me a copy of the letter?"

"Certainly, keep it yourself. We have all seen it."

"Thank you." Brett placed the envelope and its contents in his pocket-book. Then, turning to the detective, he said:

"Now, Mr. Winter, I want to ask you a favour. Do not worry Mrs. Hilmer until you hear from me."

"By all means, Mr. Brett. But am I to report to the Commissioner that Lady Delia has been found, or has, at any rate, explained that she is not dead?"

"There is no immediate necessity why a report of any kind should be made?"

"None."

"Then leave matters where they are at present."

"But why?" put in Sir Charles. "Is it not better to put an end to all inquiries, at least so far as my wife is concerned? It is her desire, and, I may add, my own, now that I know something of her fate."

"Of course, if you wish it, Lyle, I have no valid objection."

"Oh, no, no. Do not look at it that way. I leave the ultimate decision entirely to you."

"In that case, then, I recommend complete silence in all quarters at present."

The detective left them, and as he passed out into Victoria Street his philosophy could find but one comprehensive dictum. "This *is* a rum go," he muttered, unconsciously plagiarising himself on many previous occasions.

The baronet now sat down, and meditatively chewed the handle of his umbrella.

"What is this nonsense Mensmore's sister talked about being responsible for my wife's death?" he said.

"I do not pretend to understand," answered Brett. "Little more than a week ago she learnt for the first time of your wife's supposed murder. Of that I am quite positive. She then feared that her brother was implicated, and without trusting me with the reasons for her belief, she took such steps as she thought best to safeguard him."

"Took steps! What steps?" Sir Charles jerked the words out impetuously.

"She went off after him to the south of France, and found him in Florence. What she said I cannot guess, but the result was their visit here to-night. During our interview it came out, quite by accident, that some furniture was taken from her place to her brother's on the morning of November 6th, thus shifting the venue of Lady Delia's death—or imagined death I must now say—from No. 12 Raleigh Mansions, to No. 61. This discovery was as startling to Mrs. Hilmer as to us, for she forthwith protested that the whole affair arose from her fault, and practically asked the detective to arrest her on the definite charge of murder."

(To be continued.)

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

First of all I want you to read the two new series of stories which start in this number under the respective titles of "A Keeper of Secrets," and "Tales Told Off Duty." I think you will find them to your liking. When you have finished them, and also the other stories in the number, you might hand the paper to your friends. Incidentally, you will thus do a double favour, first to your friends, who will be provided with a budget of good reading which they might otherwise miss, and secondly to myself by making *Short Stories* known to them and thus securing potential new readers.

❦❦❦

Writing from Arbroath, "E. W."—who is a lady—regrets the "alteration made of late with regard to the 'Anecdote Competition' in *Short Stories*.

"Till a few weeks back anecdotes had to deal with a certain subject, but now they may deal with any subject.

"I am sure numbers of your readers will agree with me that the competition is far more interesting when just dealing with a given subject.

"Hoping that I don't give any offence, and with all good wishes for *S.S.*"

❦❦❦

Of course, there's no offence, dear madam. You do me the greatest kindness by criticising the paper. It is by such means that I get to know what readers like or dislike.

I am quite ready to alter the conditions of the Storyette Competition if it is so desired. Perhaps other readers will let me have their opinions on the matter.

❦❦❦

"Walter," who is seventeen years of age, has a disappointment to chronicle. It is that the maidens of real life do not equal the damsels of fiction in physical beauty "by long chalks." For some months he has been a diligent reader of *Short Stories* and has allowed himself to fall in love with some of the heroines he has read of therein. "They are sometimes described as being so sweet and charming that it is impossible to help loving them," he says, "but, unfortunately, one does not meet their like in actual life. Here in Manchester, at any rate, there seems to be a dearth of even passably pretty girls."

I hasten to disclaim all participation in this opinion of "fair Mancunians." Manchester has certainly its fair share of feminine beauty. Many years ago when I was staying at Chorlton-cum-Hardy, I remember meeting the most charming girl I ever——but that's another, and purely domestic story.

No, "Walter" you are not right in what you say. The world contains plenty of pretty and charming girls if you have an eye for them. Doubtless, you will meet one all in good time, and when the inevitable does happen, say in ten years, don't forget to send me a piece of cake.

❦❦❦

Strangely enough, a subject akin to the foregoing is raised by "Admirer," who maintains that Norwich (his place of residence), in his opinion, contains more pretty girls than any other city of its size.

I don't know Norwich very well, but, speaking generally, this strikes me as being rather a sweeping statement. Feminine charms abound in every place, and no one town can lay claim to anything like a monopoly. At the same time, I am bound to admit that one seems to meet more pretty faces in some places than in others. Speaking off-hand, I should place Richmond and Brixton in the place of honour among London's suburbs; while, so far as provincial towns are concerned, Bath and Eastbourne have quite their share of beauty. But, then, one's experience is necessarily limited, and with wider knowledge would inevitably come modification of opinion. Probably readers whose experience has differed from mine will have different ideas on the subject. As far as space allows, *Short Stories* is willing to give such opinions an airing.

❦❦❦

"E. Elton" (Leicester) is proud of his country's flag, and is especially delighted with our series, "The Lion's Wars," which he says have taught him more than he ever knew before of events which have had so much to do with the building up of our glorious Empire. He thinks that this series ought to be very widely read, to which I say most heartily, "Hear, hear!"

❦❦❦

"Minnie" is anxious to know whether her lover loves her or no. They were engaged, and their parents forbade them to have anything to do with each other; so they parted, promising to wait and be true. Now, whenever she goes into the town, she sees him talking and walking with other girls. She asked him to return her photograph, and he declined to do so. There is someone else who loves her, but she does not know what to do, as she promised to wait for James. ——— He is not treating you as he should, "Minnie." Ask him what he means; and if you find that he is not keeping his promise to you, I should tell him that you do not wish to have anything further to do with him.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 5,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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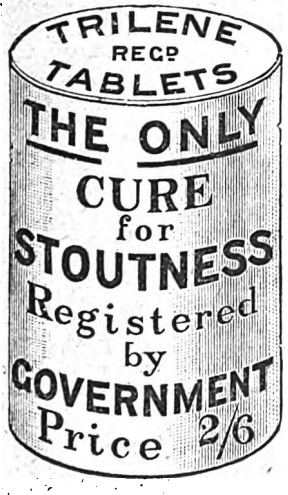

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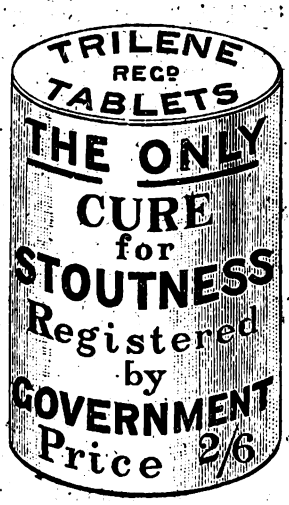

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely. You have our united thanks, and if I can do anything to promote your interests I will freely use my utmost endeavours to do so.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

MRS. DARNLEY SMITH, Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, writes: "Trilene Tablets have reduced my weight very much. I am so much lighter in every way, and better in health."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st. and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

"77 Hindhill Street, Heywood, February 5th, 1898.

"Gentlemen,—I have not quite finished the box of Tablets and am 21lb. lighter. The change is great, and several friends are beginning the treatment, which not only reduces fat but strengthens rheumatic joints—such has been the case with me. "Yours sincerely, M. A. HEYWOOD."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Risholme Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44, Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

A. M. PRATT of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

MRS. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

MR. WALKER, 236 London Road, Hazelgrove, Stockport, says: "I have used one box and am 14lb. lighter. Send another soon as possible."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs, says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

MRS E. ALEXANDER, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They have reduced me quite 2 stone, and I am now quite cured."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes "I am reduced from 12st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

MRS. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Mrs. TAYLOR-ROBINSON, of Tweed Green House, Whalley Range, Manchester, says: "I feel so much lighter and better since taking your Tablets, and am so much thinner that I hardly recognise myself."

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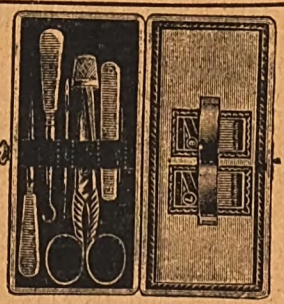

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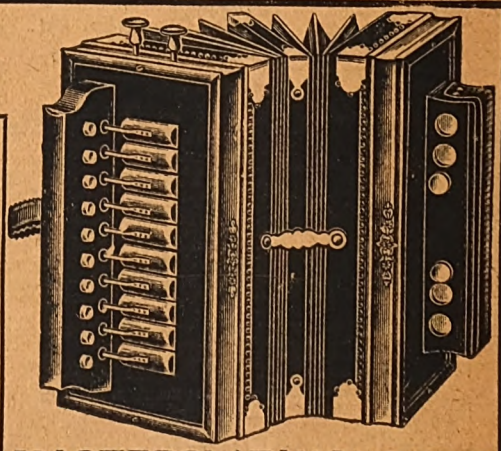

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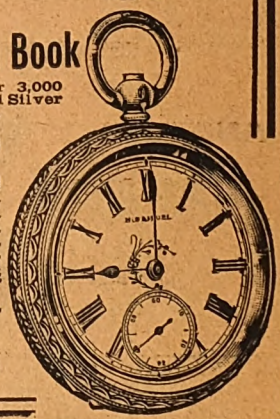

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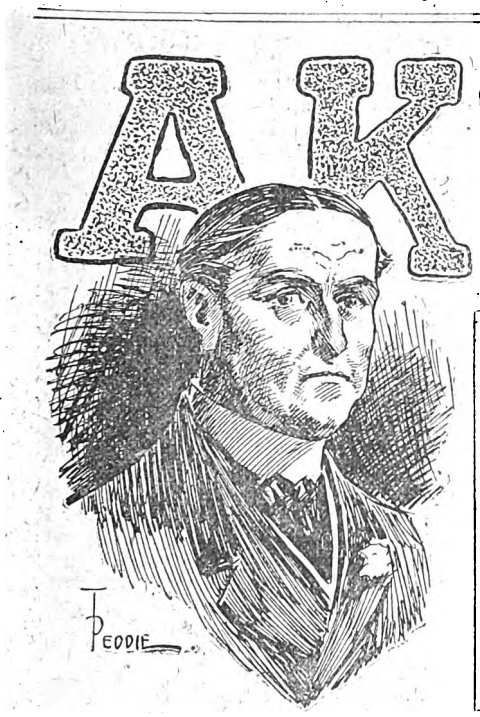
SHORT STORIES.

No. 636.] For the Week Ending March 9th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.



By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Being Days in the Professional Life of the late Mr. Hugo Pontifex, the Famous West-end Solicitor.

To those who had only met him casually in Society, the late Mr. Pontifex was a good-tempered mystery. Bluff, handsome, and, in spite of his middle-age, a little of a dandy, he seemed the last man in the world to deserve his reputation, which was that of the keenest, most audacious, and unerring of family lawyers. Fair-haired, and powerful as an athlete, his striking appearance was increased by his eyes, one of which was grey and one blue.

In reality, however, Hugo Pontifex had a wide and almost exclusively aristocratic practice. He seldom briefed a barrister, seldom set foot in a court of justice, but single handed he hunted down, captured, and safely buried mystery after mystery of terrible import to Mayfair and Belgravia.

An expert in strangling scandal, he lived a life of enthralling interest, and died a rich man. When his executors went through his papers they found nothing to satisfy their curiosity, though plenty to excite it. Hugo Pontifex knew the value of fire—and the dangers of ink. But from time to time he related to the writer, who enjoyed a certain measure of his confidence, the incidents which form the basis of the following stories. In speaking of these strange fragments of drama, Mr. Pontifex himself employed fictitious names, the present author being left to guess vainly at the identity of the genuine actors.

II.—THE TRUE STORY OF THE AMBERLEY MARRIAGE.

"GET me a hansom."

Mr. Pontifex uttered this brief command into the mouthpiece of the speaking-tube at his elbow. Then he replaced the whistle, hung up the tube, and began to copy on to a slip of paper one of the many curt memoranda contained in a small red note-book which he took from a locked drawer. When he had finished and put away the note-book the scrap of scribbling-paper held a name and address. It read:

"Colonel Denis Amberley, V.C.,
The Towers,
Hailey,
Bucks."

The solicitor rose, and picking up a smart kit-bag of cow-hide from a corner, walked out to the St. James' Street exit of the block that held his offices. He took with him, carefully folded, the slip of paper on which he had copied the address in Buckinghamshire.

"Paddington," he said to the driver of the cab that was in waiting, and entering it with his kit-bag, was borne off through the West-end a cool, almost indolent figure, lounging in the open hansom, and gazing dreamily at the crowded streets and the early afternoon sunshine, through the half-closed lids of his singular eyes.

The appointment which was carrying Mr. Pontifex towards Buckinghamshire on this June day, had been made some day or two previously, in a short and formal communication that had asked him to leave town, should it be possible, without a moment's delay. That note was endorsed "Private," and signed "Denis Amberley." The addition of the writer's military rank and distinctions in Mr. Pontifex's memorandum was the result of that gentleman's own cautious investigations. He had been detained in London for some forty-eight hours, and had profited by them to acquaint himself with certain details of Denis Amberley's career.

A brilliant officer, still in the first prime of a vigorous life, admittedly handsome, almost the last of an old county family, the life-tenant of a fine estate and fortune, and—a bachelor; such was Mr. Pontifex's most recent, and as yet unseen client. Some three months before, the Colonel had returned from South Africa with a Boer bullet through his shoulder, and had settled down at the historic home of the Amberleys—that is to say, at The Towers, near Hailey. To the surprise of his friends, although that popular person, a gallant soldier, home from the wars, Colonel Denis Amberley had been practically invisible during the season that was just closing.

Mr. Pontifex enjoyed his railway journey through the drowsy afternoon, and still more the spanking run to The Towers in a comfortable dog-cart. His destination proved to be a pleasant country house, of ancient date

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but fairly modern adaptation. A lawyer's scrutiny is keen, and as Mr. Pontifex surveyed The Towers and the fine park and estate surrounding it, he decided mentally that he would not be required to advise upon any financial problem. Colonel Amberley had plainly money and to spare.

The butler received him with practised ease, and Mr. Pontifex and his kit bag were escorted to a bright sleeping room, where he made a rapid toilet, for the Buckinghamshire roads had been dusty. As he descended the galleried staircase to join the servant who was to show him to Colonel Amberley's apartment, Mr. Pontifex heard the rustle of skirts and g'anced round.

On the level upper landing that he was passing there moved a woman, young and beautiful. She was a brunette of brunettes, dark-eyed, dark-haired, dark-skinned. Her lips were scarlet, but peculiarly thin and compressed, her gaze piercing and critical, her features small, regular, and determined. When she disappeared

Mr. Pontifex started. A little hand had been laid upon his arm.

into a corridor that opened from the massive landing, she left upon Mr. Pontifex's mind the impression of a personality both powerful and selfish. Also, he felt certain that she had been watching for him, and that in her single instant's observation she had taken a profound and comprehensive review of the new-comer.

Reflectively the solicitor pursued his descent. Traversing a second and lower landing, he crossed the extremity of a narrow lobby, arched and dimly lighted. Mr. Pontifex started—a little hand had been laid upon his arm.

"Please," said a sweet voice; "you are the surgeon that Colonel Amberley expected, aren't you—may I speak to you a moment?"

The solicitor did not disclaim the character with which he had been so unceremoniously invested. He was looking admiringly at the speaker; save for her youth and beauty she was the antithesis of the woman Mr. Pontifex had seen upon the upper landing. Fair and sunny, with wilful curls of a golden-brown, and tender blue eyes, she had a complexion of snow, warmed by the tiny blushes that ebbed and flowed to her soft cheeks. Mr. Pontifex noticed that she wore the prettiest of walking-costumes and a large and summery hat. He bowed gravely, as if to grant the request she had preferred.

His petitioner, colouring hotly, drew him into the dusky entry. The solicitor perceived that she had taken a hasty survey of the staircase, as if afraid of an interruption.

"I—I am Gladys Ansell," she said simply; "I am engaged to be married to Denis—to Colonel Amberley. I know it's shamefully unconventional my speaking to you like this on the sly. But I wanted to see you before anyone else to—to ask you if you wouldn't urge Colonel Amberley to leave Hailey and go abroad for a while. I'm sure it's his only chance of getting better, and the other doctors say he mustn't risk it. And if he stops here he will die."

The tears sprang to her blue eyes and her low tones faltered.

Mr. Pontifex studied her in silence—he had begun to twist the emerald ring on his finger.

"A woman's instinct is a thing to be reckoned with," he told her; "and yet the doctors are sometimes in the right."

Gladys Ansell shook her head—she was struggling with her grief and could not speak. Some words broke from her lips at last.

"It's not instinct," she sobbed; "I know. They are all blind, every one of them, and Denis will be killed."

She hid her face in her palms.

"I can't lose him," she moaned; "I can't lose him—oh, what shall I do!"

The girl checked herself to listen apprehensively.

"There's someone coming downstairs," she whispered; "go, quick!" and she herself darted into the gloom of the passage.

Mr. Pontifex strode on to the galleried landing in a second and resumed his descent with the greatest unconcern. But, absent-minded as he seemed, he had remarked in a lightning glance that the dark-eyed girl was leaning over the loftiest of the carved oak balustrades. Her expression was more absorbed and masterful than ever.

Reaching the hall, the solicitor was ushered by the impassive footman into an attractive apartment, all French windows, settees, sweeping curtains and *bric-à-brac*.

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"Mr. Pontifex, sir," announced the servant.

Someone rose from a lounge—someone with a stooping frame and who walked with a stick. Yet the face of this person was still clean-cut and military, the shoulders square and strong. The stoop was that of the invalid and not the aged.

A trembling hand was held out to the solicitor. "I am glad to see you at last, Mr. Pontifex," he was told; "I am Colonel Denis Amberley. Pray be seated." The solicitor accepted the invitation; his host motioned to a stand placed conveniently.

"You smoke?" he inquired; "here are cigarettes, if you prefer them—Havanas and my own choice, Trichinopolies—I never smoke anything else. The box is almost empty, as you see; but be reassured I have ample reserves."

He rang as he spoke and ordered a fresh box of his favourites.

Mr. Pontifex, rejecting the Trichinopolies, took a Havana. The Colonel relighted his own cigar.

"I ought just to explain to you, Mr. Pontifex," said Denis Amberley when the door had finally closed behind the footman, "that my household regard you as a distinguished surgeon, whom I am consulting informally on the score of an old friendship. I did not wish it to be known that I was having recourse to a lawyer, and one, at that, of your exceptional reputation."

The solicitor nodded—he comprehended some little of the proceedings on the staircase.

"I am," went on the Colonel, 'tenant for life of The Towers and its rent-roll, and at present a bachelor." He sighed, and touched the ash from his cigar. "The next heir," he continued, "is my cousin, daughter of my father's sister, who married in France a French physician. Both died some years ago, and I had the girl brought here and taken care of, setting up a chaperone for the purpose. Julie is extremely good-looking, a brunette of a most striking kind, and for a while I had a secret fancy to marry her. If I married anyone else, and had had children, Julie would be practically disinherited. Well, the best laid plans—you know the proverb. I met someone else. I came back from South Africa to recuperate and found a new rector at Hailey. His nineteen-year-old daughter was my fate—I fell in love with Gladys Ansell."

Denis Amberley puffed at his cigar troublously.

"Julie took it quietly," he said. "Of course, I told her that I would have her provided for, in spite of my marriage; but I could see that she had expected to be mistress of The Towers, either as my wife or successor. Young as she is, she is cool, fierce, passionate, ambitious. Almost since the day she learnt of my engagement to Gladys Ansell, I have felt that I was a dying man."

The Colonel had finished his statement in a nervous whisper. Mr. Pontifex did not vary the small cloudlets that were stealing from his nostrils. The lids were lowered over his curious eyes.

"My marriage draws near," murmured Denis Amberley, "but my doctors insist that it must be postponed. They warn me against excitement. My complaint puzzles them hopelessly. Yet, even with my life and Gladys' happiness at stake, I dare not tell them that I am being poisoned—poisoned, and by Julie Lepage."

The instrument was a phypodermic syringe. Mr. Pontifex had seen enough.

Mr. Pontifex laid down his Havana.

"You have reasons for your belief, I suppose?" he commented drily.

The Colonel leant forward to whisper.

"Once," he said, "when I was, to all appearance, asleep upon this very couch, she came and looked at me—looked at me and smiled—a terrible, significant smile, as I saw through my lashes. And then she put out her hand and touched the pulse in my wrist and smiled again. That smile awakened me to my danger. Since then I have guarded my food and drink in ways that have made those around me think me mad, and yet I have grown worse, even when she spent, at my insistence, a fortnight in town. The only signs of improvement I have shown were during a pretended quarrel with Gladys. Yet I have not dared to breathe my knowledge to a soul, even to my darling, for I have no proof. If I could but get away from Hailey! But

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they say that my heart is so weak that it would be certain death to face travelling."

He was interrupted by the sound of a gong beaten in the hall outside.

"That is the dressing gong," explained the Colonel; "never mind, we will finish our talk later. I want you to see the woman I suspect so gravely, Mr. Pontifex; that is why I have arranged to dine in company to-night, invalid as I am. If she is to be unmasked and defeated it is you who must do it, and without publicity—I cannot send my father's niece to gaol." He bowed the solicitor out of the apartment and summoned his attendant to help him to his own dressing-room.

Mr. Pontifex went thoughtfully about his toilet. Yet he performed it with his usual rapidity and returned in the gathering twilight to the hall. The dinner-gong proper had not gone and he stepped into the room in which he had had his interview with the Colonel.

As he entered, moving in the silent fashion natural to him, he saw that it was not empty. By the Colonel's smoking-table, under the vague glow of the electric pendant, stood the girl he had first passed on the staircase and whose black eyes and resolute type of beauty he had since decided could be none other than those of Julie Lepage, Denis Amberley's suspected cousin. But now she was gorgeous in a gown of crimson silk, with a train like that of a court robe.

She was unconscious of his presence and absorbed by her occupation. In one hand she held a bundle of the Trichinopolies from the freshly-opened box, in the other some instrument that she was applying to each of the cigars in turn.

Mr. Pontifex started violently. The instrument was a hypodermic syringe with a long needle! Mr. Pontifex had seen enough.

He regained the door and passed out—he knew now the reason why Denis Amberley's powers had so strangely failed him during the last three months, and knew, too, why the Frenchwoman had smiled so terribly as she stole to her victim's side to feel his enfeebled pulse. But how to act on that knowledge—this was the problem.

As the solicitor pondered, the dinner-gong sounded and he moved towards the dining-room.

The party at the oval table resolved itself into one of five—Gladys Ansell, whom the near neighbourhood of the rectory had enabled to change her costume and return for dinner in a simple white frock, Julie Lepage, blazing like a poppy in the gown that only a Frenchwoman and a brunette dare wear, the Colonel, Mr. Pontifex, and a gentle old lady in a rustling black silk. She was Julie's chaperone and more than half afraid of her. The solicitor had taken the seat on the Frenchwoman's right, glancing significantly at the colonel as he did so. Julie Lepage studied her neighbour with covert hostility—it was plain that she was on her guard against this supposed surgeon who was a friend of Colonel Amberley.

Mr. Pontifex exerted himself to draw her into conversation—he was a skilful entertainer and, though his own brain was busy with the task before it, he soon succeeded in casting the spell of his animation upon his fellow-diners. Even Denis Amberley grew less wan and frail, and the sweet, sad countenance of Gladys Ansell brightened to see her betrothed so unwontedly cheerful. Occasionally she looked across at Mr. Pontifex, perplexed yet encouraged by his high spirits.

A daring idea had taken possession of the solicitor's mind. He pretended that the wine-glasses at the Frenchwoman's elbow were too near his own, and moved them, with a slight apology. He had seen that she liked champagne and had emptied her glass once already; it had just been refilled. He sighed inaudibly as he watched her drink from it again and again. The sigh was one of relief—he had laid the first stone of his plot.

When the dessert was reached he had decided upon the exact manner in which he would lay the second one. His own glass had been replenished—he raised it and bowed to the delicate figure at the head of the table.

"Your health, Colonel Amberley," he said clearly, and as the Colonel's eyes met his, the solicitor shot a warning glance that puzzled the gallant officer not a little. He murmured a sentence of thanks. Mr.

"Save me! Save me!" she implored. "Don't let me die! I'm afraid to die!"

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Pontifex put his glass to his lips, held it there an instant, and set it down with the liquor untouched.

"A thousand pardons," he cried. "I forgot that the wine was champagne; I never drink healths in champagne. Once I could have done so, now the wine seems to me unlucky."

"Oh, why?" asked Gladys Ansell, putting down her own glass heavily. Mr. Pontifex shrugged his shoulders; the second stone of his plot was in position—what would happen when he began upon the superstructure?

"It is associated in my mind," he answered, meeting kindly the blue orbs of the Colonel's betrothed, "with a curious tragedy in which I took part." He turned to the Frenchwomen at his side. "Singularly enough," he added, "the heroine, or, rather, the female villain of the piece, was a compatriot of yours, Miss Lepage. She was a relation of a client of mine—she—she tried to—to poison a man; a man she had once loved."

Julie Lepage started, despite herself. She veiled the motion by lifting one of her white shoulders cynically and putting her champagne-glass to her mouth.

"She tried to poison him," went on Mr. Pontifex, deliberately, "in a most ingenious and original way." He paused to give the next few words their full effect. "That way was to poison a brand of cigars of which he was particularly fond, and of which he kept a stock, as he smoked them regularly."

Denis Amberley's face had become very white; his fingers were clutching at the edge of the chair on which he sat.

But Julie Lepage was looking down, steadily, at a cluster of grapes upon her plate. She might have been transformed to stone, so still was she sitting.

"The secret was discovered—fortunately for my client's life," went on Mr. Pontifex quietly, his grey eye marking her every feature; "and, in order to do justice upon the wretched creature without bringing scandal on an old and honourable family, I had a proportion of the poison extracted from a number of the cigars.

"One evening—at her cousin's house, the man she had tried to kill was her cousin, I don't think I said that——"

He hesitated, as if to increase the tension at the table—Gladys Ansell's lips were set and her face as white as that of her betrothed.

Only the pleasant chaperone, in her black silk dress, was listening to the story as to some interesting anecdote.

"This proportion of concentrated poison was introduced dexterously, by myself," added the solicitor, still with his grey eyes on Julia Lepage, "into the Frenchwoman's wine-glass—a champagne glass, as it happened. The poison in its concentrated state was deadly; the would-be murderer had but a few hours to live."

A piercing shriek broke into the narrative, which Mr. Pontifex had so cunningly woven. Julie Lepage had sprung bolt upright and was clutching at her throat.

The next moment she was crouching at the solicitor's feet.

"Save me! save me!" she implored; "don't let me die, I'm afraid to die, I deserve it. I know, I did try to kill Denis because he had ceased to love me and because I was going to lose The Towers and all the money. But I will atone, I will atone, if you will only save me. I can tell you what will counteract the poison—save me, save me, for pity's sake."

Mr. Pontifex stepped back—the diners had risen and were staring at the tall figure and the writhing form of the woman his genius had so effectually unmasked. Fearful for the physical consequences of the Frenchwoman's terror—she was bent double and shuddering violently—he said sternly:

"Listen, you are not poisoned, only tricked. Your wine-glass was as innocent as mine. I only discovered your crime to-night—I have had no time to extract the poison or to ascertain its nature. Rise, and calm yourself."

Julie Lepage leapt to her feet—a paroxysm of fury distorting her countenance. An instant she stood thus clenching her hands and gasping for breath. Then turning on her heel, she burst from the room.

* * * * *

That was the last of Julie Lepage, so far as the dwellers at The Towers were concerned. The same night, by stealth, she left the house and vanished into the unknown. Nor did all Denis Amberley's well-meant inquiries ever bring him the slightest news of her. Though she had done her best to kill him he would have seen that she did not want. But whether she lived or died they never heard.

How she had learnt the hideous lessons which she carried into practice upon Colonel Amberley cannot now be known. Mr. Pontifex, however, found that Victor Lepage, her father, had been familiar to the French police as a brilliant, but unscrupulous authority upon poisons, so that doubtless her skill was but the reflection of an even greater one.

Denis Amberley, freed from her devastating shadow, swiftly regained his health and vigour, and Mr. Pontifex was an honoured guest at his wedding. As he sat by the bride at the merry meal which followed, he ventured to ask her what reason she had had for urging upon him in their stolen first interview that Colonel Amberley should go abroad.

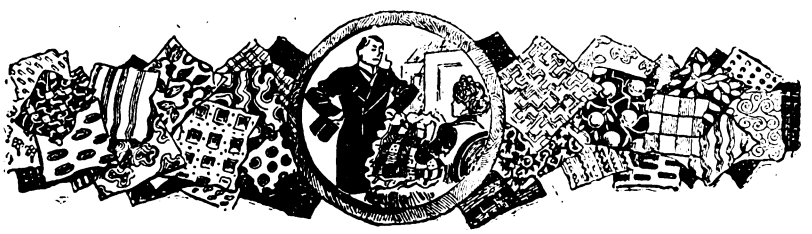
Gladys Amberley shook her head and peeped at him out of her pretty blue eyes. "I had no reason but instinct," she said.

"But you told me you knew," objected the solicitor deferentially.

"A woman always knows—when she is sure!" was the retort; "and I was sure that Julie—but don't let us speak of it. It was too terrible."

"Humph!" said Hugo Pontifex. "Well, he's going abroad now—specially conducted." And Gladys Amberley blushed.

R. NORMAN SILVER.



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JULIA.

His name was really Samuel Thomas Brooks; but among his fellow employés at Messrs. Podmore and Smythe's, he was known as "Julia."

It was Jack Norris, one of the cashiers, who thus nicknamed him.

"He is so precious green! so jolly meek and mild!" observed Norris, a day or two after the arrival of the new assistant. "Whenever I look at him, I always think of an aunt of mine who lives down in Devonshire. She's a spinster, and wears spectacles. This chap Brooks certainly ought to meet her; he's turned three and twenty (told me so himself, the innocent!) and Aunt Julia's only a trifle over thirty—an ideal match!"

After that, Brooks was invariably addressed and spoken of as "Julia."

He winced slightly, when, at breakfast, Norris first hailed him by the cognomen; but by the end of the day he was used to the name, and didn't seem to mind it in the least.

Ere he had been a week at Podmore and Smythe's, he was "Julia" to everybody—from the head shopwalker down to the youngest apprentice.

There certainly wasn't much of the man about Samuel Thomas Brooks. Meekness, and a mild, even temper are excellent attributes in their way, but Brooks was meek and mild to that degree which, in this hard, unfeeling world of ours, generally earns for a man the epithets "soft" and "sawney."

Brooks had come straight from a small provincial drapery shop to the mammoth West-end emporium of Podmore and Smythe. His accent was broad, and his "greenness" in most matters something to marvel at. But he was an excellent counter-hand, thoroughly well up in his business, willing, hardworking, punctual, and never grumbled when it was necessary to put in an hour or two's labour after closing time.

Naturally, therefore, Brooks suited his employers, and naturally also, his fellow-assistants imposed upon his good nature. Unpleasant tasks among the dustiest of the top shelves, seemed always to fall to "Julia's" share; and when he had no customer to serve, he was generally to be found lending some colleague a hand. "Will you do me a favour, Julia?" was a constant query, and Brooks was never known to refuse; which was, of course, weak on his part. He got small thanks for his many kindnesses; indeed, favours from "Julia" soon came to be accepted as quite in the natural order of things, and, consequently, were not regarded as favours at all.

But if, in the shop, Brooks led the life of a slave, his existence after business hours was still worse.

The domestic arrangements of a big retail establishment, where the employés live "inside," resemble in some respects those of a boarding-school. The assistants eat their meals at long tables, presided over by the heads of departments; whilst, except that their bedrooms contain about half-a-dozen beds instead of a score or so, the school dormitory system may be said to be in vogue. Another point of resemblance is, that there are generally a few bullies, who operate with impunity on their victims. The tortures meted out by the said bullies are more of a verbal than a physical nature, albeit brute force is not entirely unknown, as new apprentices know to their cost.

As might be expected, Brooks had much to endure in an establishment like Podmore and Smythe's. He was the butt of the dinner-table; the bullies openly insulted him; the practical-jokers were continually devising fresh traps for his benefit; and the would-be wits made quite a reputation for themselves at "Julia's" expense.

Brooks never attempted to retaliate, either by word or deed. Occasionally a remark would hurt, and he would flush to the roots of his straw-coloured hair; but, as a rule, he grinned sheepishly, and affected not to mind. Altogether, what with his pallid, innocent face, his mild blue eyes, and his gentle, timid ways, Brooks was a perfect specimen of the genus "milk-sop."

One of the worst of his tormentors was Jack Norris, the cashier, who, as already related, had first dubbed the new assistant "Julia."

Now, Norris wasn't by nature a bully; as a matter of fact, he was at bottom rather a decent fellow. But being

The bullies openly insulted him.

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one of the muscular, good-looking, dashing sort himself, he couldn't, as he was often wont to declare:

"Stand namby-pamby chaps at any price."

To deal kindly with milk-sops was, in Norris' opinion, a big mistake.

"It only makes 'em softer," he would say. "Treat 'em roughly—have no mercy, that's the only way to make men of 'em. You know what I mean, slang 'em right and left! When the meek innocents get to know that they've left their mothers' apron-strings, they now and again pluck up a bit, and learn to take their own part in the world. Now, this chap Julia hasn't the spirit of a mouse. He doesn't smoke nor drink, never goes to a music-hall, and allows every youngester in the place to insult him. He's twenty-three, and is as timorous as a girl of half his age. Bah! it's downright disgusting."

Norris lost no opportunity of practising the treatment he recommended for the cure of milk-soppiness. He was forever badgering Brooks, and, as they both slept in the same room, the victim's sufferings commenced first thing in the morning, and only ended when Norris dropped off to sleep at night.

In addition to verbal persecution, Brooks had to endure "apple-pie" beds, hair-brushes between the sheets, and various other tricks of the school-dormitory order.

Nothing served, however, to rouse him into a display of spirit. He suffered every indignity to be heaped upon him with a patient meekness which exasperated Jack Norris to such a degree, that he became more brutal in his methods. Frequently he aroused "Julia" by douching him with ice-cold water; while, on more than one occasion, he hurled a boot at his victim with highly-painful results.

But it was no good. Brooks simply could not be induced to retaliate, nor even to show a momentary flash of temper. And never once did he lodge a complaint against Norris or any of the others by whom he was so systematically persecuted.

* * * * *

Brooks had lived this dog's life for about three months, when a change began to be noticed in Jack Norris. Usually of a vivacious, not to say noisy, disposition, the cashier suddenly grew moody and taciturn. He stayed out at night later than ever, and frequently returned somewhat unsteady on his legs; but instead of relating his evenings' adventures and boasting of his conquests, as was formerly his wont, he now rarely opened his lips. He even neglected "Julia," a lack of attention for which that individual was duly grateful.

The general opinion was, that the course of Norris' love affairs was not running too smoothly; and as he grew more and more reserved, Podmore and Smythe's young men whispered to each other that the cashier must have been very badly hit indeed.

Meanwhile, life became a trifle more endurable to Brooks. He was, it is true, still badgered at the dinner-table and imposed upon in the shop; but in the bedroom, at any rate, he enjoyed peace. For Norris had always ruled the dormitory, and now that he was in a perpetual state of gloom, the other assistants who slept there, generally went to bed in silence.

One night Brooks retired to rest at the early hour of nine. No one else was in the dormitory, and from past experience Brooks knew that the five neighbouring beds were not likely to be occupied until midnight or thereabouts.

For it was Wednesday, a day on which Messrs. Podmore and Smythe's huge establishment was practically deserted between the hours of 3 and 12 p.m.

As, however, Brooks had no friends to visit, and did not patronise places of amusement, early-closing day

"Hand over that revolver!"

simply meant for him an afternoon stroll, an evening devoted to writing home, and an early retirement to rest.

On this night, he was lying in bed, thinking of nothing in particular, and waiting for Morpheus to overtake him, when the door suddenly opened, and someone entered.

There was only a feeble glimmer of gas burning in the room, and for a moment Brooks failed to recognise the intruder. But when the latter halted and sat down on the second bed from the door, Brooks saw that it was Jack Norris.

The cashier presently stooped, and pulled from beneath the bed a small portmanteau. This he hastily unlocked and opened, and took out something which he placed in his pocket; then he re-locked the bag, shoved it under the bedstead again, and, apparently oblivious of Brooks's presence, went out, leaving the door wide open.

Brooks watched him traverse the passage, and commence the ascent of a flight of stairs which led to the attic regions.

Then, like a flash, he sprang out of bed, drew on a few articles of clothing, and followed. He had caught a

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glimpse of the glittering "something" which had gone into Norris' pocket.

Reaching the landing above, he halted a moment; then, hearing a footstep, he stealthily crept on until he came to an attic that was used as a place of storage for all sorts of lumber. The door was open and the room was flooded with the moonlight which poured through the window.

And, facing the window, stood Norris, his right arm raised, and the shining muzzle of a revolver pressed against his temple. His finger was already on the trigger, when Brooks the timid made a spring, clutched at Norris' wrist, and dexterously snatched the weapon from his grasp.

"Here, I say; this won't do, you know," he coolly remarked. "Suicide's cowardly."

"Julia!" gasped the cashier in astonishment; then added hoarsely: "Give me that pistol, Julia, and clear out. It's all up with me—I've nothing to live for."

"I shan't," retorted Brooks, very firmly. "Don't be a coward, Norris. What's the matter?"

"Hand over that revolver, d'you hear?"

Norris was now trembling violently and clutching at the window-sash for support.

"I won't!"

"You must!"

"I won't!" repeated Brooks. "Come! tell me what's the matter. Perhaps I can help you, Norris."

"You're a likely one to help me, even if you could, after the way I've treated you."

"Never mind about that. Tell me what's wrong."

And straightway Norris blurted out his miserable story.

His cash—or rather Podmore and Smythe's cash—was £18 short, and on the following day his accounts were going to be audited. For some time past he had been "borrowing" occasional sovereigns from the cash-box, manipulating the entries in his books in such a way that, in the ordinary course of events, the shortage in his balance might have gone undetected for years. But about twelve months ago, one of Podmore and Smythe's cashiers had been "found out," and since then audits had been of more frequent occurrence than formerly.

During the last few weeks, Norris had lived in constant dread of discovery, and now he had received a hint that a "surprise audit" would take place on the following day. Unless he could make good the deficit, prosecution for embezzlement was inevitable; but although he spent the afternoon in trying to borrow the amount from various acquaintances (a publican or two among them) he had failed to secure the requisite loan.

"Every man-jack refused," moaned the wretched Norris, "although most of them could have have easily spared the money. Nice friends!" he added bitterly.

"The audit will take place to-morrow, you say?" asked Brooks.

"Yes, old Crosby, the ledger-clerk, told me. So give me that revolver, Brooks, and go. I'm sure to be found out, and Podmore is certain to prosecute; he had no mercy on young Fuller, and he'll have none on me. It's ruin—disgrace! I can't face it, and—and it would kill my mother!"

Brooks was silent a moment; then he observed:

"If I let you have the money between ten and half-past to-morrow morning, will it be in time?"

"Yes; but surely, Ju—Brooks, you don't really mean that you—"

"Let's go to bed," interrupted the other, "I'll get the money for you without fail."

And Brooks kept his promise. Obtaining an hour's leave of absence next morning, he rushed to the nearest post-office, and drew out by telegraph the sum of £18 from his savings bank account. He handed the money to Norris without a word, and, a few minutes afterwards the auditors appeared on the scene.

* * * * *

There are no two closer friends in Podmore and Smythe's emporium, than Brooks and Norris. The latter repaid the loan long ago, now lives strictly within his income, and is steadily saving money. Brooks is no more known as "Julia"—Norris quickly put a stop to that, and when the pair suddenly became so chummy, the assistants deemed it prudent to let Brooks alone. Some day the two mean to run a business of their own in partnership.

F. C. D.

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THE LION'S WARS

The War in Scinde.

1842-1843.

WHATEVER our merits and demerits as a nation may be, it must be confessed that in the erection of that noble fabric known as the British Empire we have been greatly favoured by fortune. By the war of 1842-3 we added the important province of Scinde to our dominions in India.

Scinde is bounded on the south by the Arabian Sea, and would have constituted, had it passed into the hands of a foreign power, a serious danger to our position in India. We have much cause, therefore, to be grateful that its conquest had not to be undertaken by us to-day.

The great province of Scinde, which has for its neighbours Beluchistan and the Punjab, has had a chequered career. Centuries ago it formed part of the great Mohammedan Empire of the East. In 1756 it was conquered by the Afghans, but in 1829 the Beluchis, aided by some hill tribes who called themselves Ameers, recovered their freedom, and raised the leader of the Taipur tribe to the position of authority.

To secure his dynasty this chief divided his dominions amongst his brothers and kinsmen, and the rivalries and jealousies to which this arrangement gave rise led to the boundaries of the country being gradually extended till they touched the frontiers of British India. These encroachments would not have been resented had they not placed the entire navigation of the Indus in their hands.

So many historians have been wont to denounce our conquest of Scinde in language of which "No fouler blot stains the pages of our history than the conquest of Scinde," is a fair sample, that one naturally expects to find that the war we are about to deal with was deliberately entered on for the purpose of annexing the country. The facts, however, show that the exact contrary is the truth.

Even if Britain had provoked the war, she might easily have shielded herself behind the plea that the conquest of the country was necessary, on account of the turbulence of the inhabitants imperilling the peace of India; but the Juts and Beluchis brought the war on themselves by deliberately breaking the treaties into which they had entered, the violations being of so grave a character, that a great blow would have been struck at our prestige if we had allowed the infringement to go unheeded. Not that we declared war on them for their perfidy. As a matter of fact they anticipated us by commencing hostilities themselves.

It is only fair, however, to state that the Beluchis had what they considered a great grievance against us. To protect our merchants residing in the country we had insisted on the Beluchis receiving a British Resident at the capital.

Now, whilst it is true that the people greatly resented the presence of this official, regarding him not as an envoy, but as a spy, they had had ample proof that he was nothing of the kind.

Our intercourse with Scinde was no new thing. In 1799 the people agreed to receive our represen-

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tative, and till 1830, although his presence provoked some friction, no actual outbreak occurred. In 1830 the Residency was besieged, and after a desperate fight our envoy was forced to quit the country.

Although the Beluchis by this time knew perfectly well what the presence of a diplomatic representative implied, they agreed in a treaty entered into two years later to again receive a Resident at Hyderabad. By this treaty they also bound themselves to assist the peaceful trading of our merchants, and full power to trade and navigate the Indus.

The Beluchis, it would seem, conceded these privileges not out of any love for the British, but because they feared the consequences of a refusal.

When disaster overtook us in Afghanistan, the Beluchis, never dreaming that we should recover from such an overwhelming calamity as the destruction of an entire army, thought they could now defy us with impunity. They ill-treated our merchants, seized their goods, and stopped the navigation of the Indus.

The breaches culminated at last in 1842 in an unprovoked attack on the Resident's house. For over four hours a handful of British soldiers kept at bay a howling mob, who, maddened by their hatred of the British, dashed again and again up the inclosures leading to the house, only to be hurled back with tremendous loss by the steady fire of our men.

Matters now assumed so threatening an aspect that the settlement of the affair was placed in the hands of Sir Charles J. Napier, an officer of invincible determination, and of the very highest military capacity. The first thing Sir Charles did was to insist that, as the existing treaty had been broken, Mir Ruskuin, the aged Prince of Upper Scinde, must as a punishment sign a more drastic treaty, the penalty of refusing being deposition and banishment.

The enemies of Britain declare that Napier induced Ali Mourad, the Prince of Lower Scinde, to persuade Mir Ruskuin to refuse to sign the treaty on the understanding that if he supported British interests Ruskuin should be deposed and Ali Mourad recognised as the head of the Ameers of Scinde. But unless it can be shown beyond the possibility of a doubt that Charles Napier was privy to the plot which led to Ruskuin seeking refuge in flight, the charge falls to the ground.

Napier in due course did depose Ruskuin and recognise as his successor Ali Mourad, but that does not prove he had been playing a double game. If Ali Mourad was his confederate it is strange that the moment Ruskuin disappeared, Napier, in anticipation of a rising, should have decided on attempting the capture of the desert fort of Emamghur, which the Beluchis declared was as "Impregnable as Heaven." Napier's enemies point to his seizure of this place as further evidence of his guilt. We consider it a proof of his innocence.

If Ali Mourad was his confederate, why should he plunge into the heart of a wilderness so drear that he had to take his own water with him lest the wells were poisoned. Napier knew that the garrison at Emamghur was four times as numerous as any force he could bring, and unless he regarded Ali Mourad as a traitor, this desert expedition was an act of stupendous folly.

The greatest hardships were experienced by the little force as they journeyed through the lonely wilderness. Their water skins soon gave out, and they had to dig wells, and nearly all their food was stolen. But as Napier wrote, "there never was such a fellow as the British soldier, he laughed and joked all the way."

At last the eight days' march came to an end. The soldiers braced themselves up for what they thought would prove a stiff piece of work, and were greatly disappointed when they found there was no enemy to fight. The garrison had evacuated the place two days before.

The fortress which consisted of a strong inner fort surrounded by walls forty feet high and flanked by towers, Napier blew up. The troops, having come thus far, would have liked to have continued the march on the chance of coming up with the garrison, but Napier, thinking that the news of what he had done would strike terror into the Beluchis, at once set out for the Indus.

During Sir Charles' absence, events had reached a crisis in Hyderabad. The Beluchi chiefs, who hated Ali Mourad, offered to sign the obnoxious treaty if a clause were inserted, admitting that Ali Mourad had betrayed Mir Ruskuin. The promptness with which the Resident declined this proposal so angered the chiefs, that he had to literally fight his way back to the Residency, which was situated about three miles from the city.

Being informed that the Beluchis had sworn on the Koran to fight the British, he barricaded his house. It was well he did so. At dawn next day all the roads leading to the Residency were crowded by a yelling mob of fanatics, who soon let it be known that if the inmates fell into their hands no mercy would be shown.

Fortunately the Resident had taken the precaution before Sir Charles Napier's departure to borrow a few soldiers of the 22nd. For over four hours this handful of British redcoats kept at bay a mob composed of perhaps the greatest desperadoes in all Asia. After spending the entire day in vain attempts to blow up the place, the Beluchis at length lost heart and retired.

As such an outrage, if overlooked, would have greatly lowered our prestige, war was at once declared.

Knowing the value of time, Sir Charles Napier made up his mind to strike promptly and strike hard. By a forced march he arrived at Muttaree on February 16th, 1843, and, ascertaining that the Ameers and their forces were posted at Meanee, ten miles off, he rested a few hours and marched through during the night hoping to take them by surprise in the morning. It was a hazardous enterprise even if he succeeded, for his little force only numbered 2,800 men with twelve guns, whilst of the Ameer army of 40,000, over 20,000 were cavalry. But Sir Charles Napier was a general with brains, and brains count in war.

He had the most profound belief in himself, and the greatest confidence in the British soldier, and therefore regarded defeat as out of the question. He laughed when an officer told him during the night that the Beluchi horde was nearly 30,000 strong.

"Well," he said, "have we not got 802 cavalry, all good men who understand their business? They are in good spirits, so am I. They will fight on a smooth plain. They love a smooth plain, as the Beluchis will soon discover. Only 40,000 Beluchis? Why the triumph is certain. Three hours' sleep and then prepare for victory."

What a dauntless soldier this great general was. He sauntered out of his tent next morning, and although a long survey convinced him that the Beluchis held a position of extraordinary strength, he chatted and laughed with his staff during the hasty morning meal, as if the victory were already won.

Surely the enemy could not have been more securely

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Drawn by] [*C. Lawson Wood.*

British and Beluchis, horse and foot, rushed in one confused mass down the steep sides of the river bed.

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posted. For 1,200 yards, the Beluchi front lined the deep nullah or dry bed of the Fullailee, and to storm the position it would be necessary to cross the dry bed and then climb a steep bank in face of a heavy fire. The flanks were not so strong. Screened by heavy jungle they afforded good cover for an attacking force. The Beluchis, conscious of their weakness, posted the bulk of their force at either end, leaving but few men to guard the centre.

As each wing was six miles from the centre, Sir Charles calculated that a couple of feigned attacks at both ends might keep the enemy sufficiently busy to enable him to break through the centre. To accomplish this, he planted his waggons at a spot about a mile to the right of the centre, just opposite the village of Kaltree, and placing behind them all his native troops, instructed them to occasionally show themselves, in order to lead the Beluchis to imagine that an attack might be expected at that point.

Taking advantage of a dip near the river bed, Sir Charles then stole with his British soldiers to where the Beluchis had built a long high wall, evidently in the belief that a wall had only to be high enough to constitute secure protection.

Sir Charles Napier determined to make his attack here, because he judged from the fact of the wall not being loopholed that no resistance would be offered. The moment the order was given our men bounded into the river bed, up the bank, across the intervening space, and scaled the wall like cats, thus cutting the enemy's position in two.

We have dwelt on these details as they show what an enormous saving of life can be effected in war if the conduct of operations is intrusted only to generals of proved capacity. Nineteen out of twenty British generals would have assailed the wings and lost hundreds of lives. Napier being a general of the brainy type effected a lodgment without losing a man.

The Beluchis, of course, bore down on us when they learnt the truth. Indeed they pressed on us in such numbers, that the 22nd, weary of killing and driven back at last by the crushing pressure, began to give way, but when Napier rode up the lost ground was recovered.

Having got into their position, it was Napier's plan to drive the enemy from the river bank on to the plain, so that his cavalry might take them in hand. The British force was now reduced to 2,500 men, and to drive the enemy from a position twelve miles long it was necessary that the men should be formed into line. The Beluchis were good fighters, but such was the prestige of the British that long and attentuated as the line was we steadily drove before us on that eventful day the whole of the vast Beluchi army till they debouched on to the plains.

Then Napier let loose his 800 horse. For two hours our troopers rode up and down and in and out of the vast Beluchi horde till the plains were drenched in blood.

Napier's object was to so disorganise the force as to compel it to surrender. He did not succeed in this. Our cavalry, after plying their swords for a couple of hours, struck at last such deadly terror into the hearts of the dark-skinned warriors that greatly to Napier's annoyance they took to flight. We lost about 250 men, the Beluchis over 8,000.

Failing to capture their army, Napier was resolved that no time should be given for them to recover. So he sent word to the Ameers that unless they surrendered unconditionally he would storm Hyderabad and hand over the city to his soldiers to sack.

The chiefs knew that our Army was ridiculously small, but was not their general, as one of the Ameers pointed out, equal to 100,000 more. So they humbly promised to submit. The Ameers sent him the keys of their fortress and waited on him in person in order to lay at his feet their jewelled swords. With that high born courtesy which has always distinguished the Napiers the swords were returned.

A little later the British Army marched through the streets of Hyderabad. The Union Jack was hoisted, the Army sang "God Save the Queen," and then if report is to be believed whiled away the evening by a little looting. They would not have been able to indulge that weakness had not Napier's attention been directed elsewhere.

One of the Ameers, Sheer Mohammed, the Lion of Meerpur had not submitted.

Knowing that the triumph of the British could not be considered complete so long as any of the Ameers remained in the field, and especially one with an army of 20,000, Sir Charles at once—to the disgust of his men who were getting intensely interested in the valuables of the city—determined to march against the unconquered chieftain. So, after sending for reinforcements which came in such numbers that he was able to leave a garrison of 1,000 men in Hyderabad, he left the city in March 1843 at the head of 5,000 men.

At Dubba, six miles from the capital, he came in touch with Mohammed and 35,000 dusky warriors. The Beluchis with an instinct as keen as the Boer for a strong defensive position had again availed themselves of the dry water courses with which Scinde abounds. Their wings as before were protected by thick jungles, and on the edge of the bank skirting the river bed, which was 8ft. deep, a strong rampart had been erected.

Napier, after reconnoitring the position, held converse with a native, and learnt to his annoyance that were the Beluchis driven from their fort position they could retreat behind another river bed 42ft. wide and 17ft. deep in the rear. As the village of Dubba is in the centre and all the houses were loopholed it was rendered unsafe to assault, Napier determined before ordering an advance to lay it in ruins.

Anticipating that the force occupying the village would retreat on its becoming untenable to the right, General Napier sent his cavalry in that direction. Our troopers, with their sabres gleaming in the sunshine and uttering loud shouts, galloped to where the Beluchi soldiers were streaming away from the village, and burst on them with such force that in their wild flight they ran at headlong speed to the second nullah, in the belief that our men dare not gallop down into a river bed 17ft. deep and up again the other side.

But we did. British and Beluchis, horse and foot, rushed in one confused mass down the steep sides of the bed, but the ascent on the other side was so precipitous that the Beluchis had time to line the parapet at the top before our men appeared in sight. The fight here was so desperate that Napier himself joined in the fray. His escapes were wonderful; a bullet shattered the hilt of his sword without injuring the hand that gripped it, another passed through his headgear, and the explosion of a Beluchi magazine close to where he was fighting singed his clothes. Yet he escaped without a scratch.

But the issue had grown uncertain. A general advance had been delayed owing to the enemy reoccupying the dismantled village for the sake of the cover afforded

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by the *débris*. It took the detachment sent to rout them out so long to accomplish their task that Napier began to think that they had failed.

The British soldier is an extraordinary person. He either rushes at the foe at headlong speed, hurrahing loudly, or marches on to the battle field with the calmness and steadiness associated with sham fights, drills, and parades. On this occasion our men marched, after clearing the village, back to the scene of battle in complete silence. They descended the bank, crossed the bed of the river, and mounted the other side before their comrades were aware of their presence. It was the sudden and precipitate retreat of the Beluchis which caused the delighted general to turn round and ask:

"Have you all been struck dumb?"

The fugitives endeavoured to make for the Indus but our troopers shepherded them with the nicest skill in the direction of the wilderness.

The completeness of the victory was not to be estimated by the number of the slain, although the casualty lists where heavy. The Beluchi killed amounted to 5,000. The demoralisation which set in after the battle was due to our having captured twenty-seven standards and all their guns. Our own casualties were trifling, being under 300 officers and men.

Unfortunately the Lion of Beluchistan escaped and managed to reach Meerpur.

He was hard at work reorganizing his force when Napier, hearing of his whereabouts, marched straight from the battlefield, to which he had returned after the rout, to Meerpur, forty miles away and burst on the Lion with such suddenness that Sheer Mohammed and his followers had only just time to leave the city by the west gate as our troops entered by the east.

The courage of the Lion being now somewhat shaken he fled precipitately with his followers to Omercote, his fortress in the desert.

But Napier was quickly on his track, the pursuit becoming so hot as soon as our men had struck the trail, that Sheer again took to flight leaving the fortress in our hands.

This happened exactly four days after the battle of Dubba during which time our men (although the heat wave had risen) covered over a hundred miles of ground. One incident of this march has a splendid significance for us to-day.

It shows that although we are a conquering race, so beneficent is our sway that the people we rule over do not regard us as most natives do their conquerors.

The heat of the wilderness in which the Lion had reared his fort was so intense, and water so scarce, that the native soldiers voluntarily offered to carry the muskets and kits of their white companions.

When the little army came, on the third day's march, on a water carrier, not a native soldier would touch a drop till the thirst of the British had been assuaged.

After the capture of Omercote, the army was formed into flying columns, the scattered bands of the Beluchis being hunted down with such vigour that all resistance gradually died away.

A few months later Scinde was formally annexed, thus adding another stone to that stately edifice, Our Indian Empire.

[NEXT WEEK: "*The Great Sikh Wars.*"]

SHORT STORIES THAT MAKE YOU LAUGH.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "Guilty Gold," by Headon Hill, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, March 11th. Post-cards only, please.

The Prize of One Guinea for the best Storyette has been won this week by Mrs. EATON, of 42 Hartington Road, West Derby, Liverpool, for the Storyette entitled "Ingenuous."

Ingenuous.

HE was a charming little fellow of four, pretty in his ways, good to look at, but as naughty as could be. He sat on the bottom step kicking his fat little legs, and refusing utterly to obey his father, who had told him to go upstairs several times in increasing degrees of severity.

After a few minutes of this clashing of wills, his exasperated parent picked him up somewhat suddenly, carried him, sat him down very firmly on a chair in his room, and then went out and shut the door.

Silence reigned. Not a sound from him for at least half-an-hour.

Then the door was opened, and a sweet little voice called out:

"Father, have you got over your tantrum yet, for I should like to come down?"

MRS. E.

A Notice.

THE churchwarden's quarterly meeting will be held every six weeks instead of half-yearly, as usual.

Next Tuesday being Ash Wednesday, an open air meeting of the congregation will be held in the vestry to determine what colour the church shall be white-washed.

C. R. S.

Tackling a Difficulty.

DURING the railway strike a new hand was driving a passenger train which should have stopped at Berwick. But, being unable to use the air-brake, he passed the platform. Having reversed the engine, he started back and passed it again. Reversing once more, he made a similar mistake.

"Let her stand, Jock," shouted the station-master. "Let her stand, we'll shift the station."

F. L.

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Not a Bull.

A member of a certain company of the Imperial Yeomanry, who had been born within the sound of Bow Bells, and was accustomed to hold forth to his comrades in the choicest Cockney dialect, was one day engaged in scouting with another member of the force. He was expressing great contempt for Boer marksmanship, and had just given the opinion that "they couldn't make a bull's-eye at fifty yards," when a Boer bullet, fired at over 1,000 yards, suddenly grazed the side of his head and stretched him senseless on the ground.

His only remark to his friend on regaining consciousness was: "Ahter!" which, being interpreted, was understood to signify "Outer," and thus to convey a further reflection on the skill of the Boer!

J. G. B.

All that Glitters is not Gold.

Some soldiers just returned from South Africa were discussing the character and deeds of ex-President Kruger, when one of them, a somewhat pompous and self-important sergeant, said:

"I don't suppose there's a man in the world who is as fond of money as old Kruger; he doesn't care what it is or how he gets it, so long as it's money, money, money."

"I'll bet you a shilling," retorted an Irish private, "that ye're wrong. There are some kinds of money he doesn't like at all, at all."

"Done!" cried the other, "prove it."

"Well," replied the Hibernian, "He's just got a sovereign from England, and a check (cheque) from the Emperor of Germany, an' I'm blowed if he wished for either of 'em."

The sergeant had to pay up.

R. F.

He Helped Himself.

A gentleman was driving along a lonely country road the other day, when he heard loud cries for help proceeding from a neighbouring wood. He hitched his horse and ran to the assistance of the person who seemed to be in distress. Upon entering the wood he was surprised and shocked to find a man who was securely tied to a tree.

"What is the matter here?" he said in astonishment.

"Oh, sir," replied the poor fellow, "I'm so glad you have come. A few hours ago I was knocked down by some tramps who rifled my pockets, and after stealing everything I had except a pocket-book in my inside vest pocket, which they fortunately overlooked, bound me to this tree and decamped."

"The scoundrels!" ejaculated the new-comer. "And so the wretches robbed you, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Took everything you had except one pocket-book in your inside pocket, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"The villains! And then they tied you tightly here—so tightly that you cannot escape?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I think I'll take the pocket-book the other fellows left."

And he did.

D. R.

Paid Better.

Saturday morning and the barber very busy.

"I'd rather shave ten Germans than one Englishman."

The rubicund foreigner in the chair smiled broadly through the lather.

"Goot," he chuckled. "Dot vos right; but vy?"

The barber took a firmer hold upon his victim's nose as he replied:

"Ten Germans pays me one and threepence—one Englishman only 1½d."

And you could have heard the thermometer drop.

A. K.

Had Him There.

A commercial traveller walked into a Post Office the other day, and scribbling off a telegram of eighteen words, handed it, together with ninepence, to the clerk. The latter rapidly scanned the telegram, and took from his drawer two stamps, 6d. and 3d., respectively, which the traveller was to affix to the form.

The traveller, however, did not affix them, but stared at the clerk.

"You must affix the stamps on yourself, sir," exclaimed the clerk.

"Oh, no, I musn't," retorted the commercial, in feigned annoyance.

"You have to, sir, I can show it you in print."

"Nonsense; let me see, then."

"Here you are!" and the clerk read from a large book that the "sender of the telegram must himself affix the stamps to the form."

"Ah! there you are," vociferated the commercial. "The stamps must be stuck on the form, not on myself. See?"

As the roars of laughter issued from the other end of the room the abashed clerk muttered words of deadly import in a low tone to himself.

F. W.

AN ELEGANT AND CHOICE PRODUCTION.

THE LADY'S MAGAZINE.

March Number Ready. 6d.

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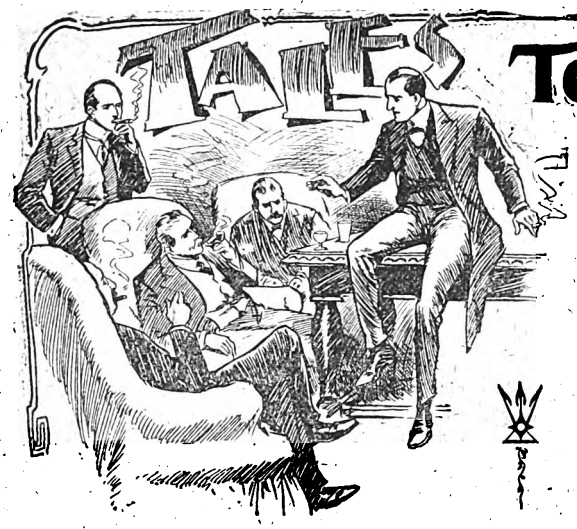

TOLD "OFF DUTY."

[You probably don't know the "Stand-Easy" Club. It isn't in the directory, and you might live next door to the place for years without knowing of its existence by that name. It isn't a conventional club; there is no subscription, and there is no register of members. It is merely a room in a quiet, orderly, and select hostelry in Westminster, where, by common consent, a number of officials of all kinds meet when "off duty." There you may find detectives from Scotland Yard, near by; firemen, commissionaires, a soldier or two, and maybe a doctor from St. Thomas' Hospital or elsewhere. A motley crowd they would be if they wore their uniforms, but at the "Stand-Easy" uniforms are a rarity, "mufti" being the unwritten rule. The result is a gathering of quiet, well-behaved, and well-dressed men. Saturday night is the time when one sees the biggest muster, for then it is the custom for one member to regale the company with a story, the story being, as a rule, an account of some incident in the teller's own career.]

An Actor's Madness.

Told by the LIMELIGHT MAN.

WHEN, a few evenings ago, a yarn was vociferously demanded of Sam Phipps, that individual looked exceedingly astonished, and, had there been a clear course to the door, he would probably have made a bolt for it. But there wasn't a clear course, and from the way in which the other members had managed to hedge Mr. Phipps in, and from the suspiciously-unanimous manner in which they had called upon him for a story, it really seemed as though the whole thing had been arranged.

"It's a put-up job, I reckon," observed Phipps, with a good-humoured grin.

"Quite right, Sam—so it is," candidly retorted one of the members. "You see, it 'ain't often we have the pleasure o' your company early enough in the evenin' for a yarn. Midnight's your usual time for droppin' in—just when most of us are thinkin' about goin' home to bed. This is the first chance you've give us since the 'Pantheon' was shut up for alterations, pretty nigh a twelvemonth ago. If the new piece you're bringin' out catches on, you'll most likely dodge us for another twelvemonth—and that's why the wink went round directly you came in this evenin'. My motto is: 'never miss opportunities—' speshully rare 'uns!"

Sam Phipps was attached to the theatrical profession. His name did not figure in the "cast," and audiences never saw or heard him; but, nevertheless, he held a post of some responsibility at that popular home of melodrama—the Pantheon Theatre.

He was, in fact, "Mr. Limes," the gentleman who, perched aloft in the wings, supplies the "conflagration's ruddy glare," in fire-scenes, and follows the persecuted heroine, the gallant hero, or the dastardly villain about the stage with a most accommodating stream of rather unnatural moonlight. Pending the production of a new play, then in rehearsal, the "Pantheon" was closed; so Sam Phipps, having an evening to spare, had decided to spend it at the Club.

Seeing he was fairly trapped, and there was nothing for it but to "oblige," Sam cleared this throat and began:

"Ever since I was a lad, I've earned my living in theatres. My father was a stage carpenter, and my mother a 'dresser'; so I may say I was born in the profession. I started as call-boy at the old Universe Theatre, and when I grew too big for the job, helped in the property-room for a time.

"When I was promoted to the 'limes,' I felt mighty important, I can assure you; for at the 'Universe,' they went in for nothin' else but sensational dramas, and limelight of all colours was used most liberal. A man wants his wits about him to work the limes as they should be worked. He's got to follow things very carefully indeed, and very often he can fairly mess up a scene through picking up his cues a second too late or two soon.

"So I had some excuse for fancyin' myself a trifle when I became 'Mr. Limes' at the Universe Theatre. It was a responsible job, and a tryin' job; but I very soon cottoned to the business, and after my first night in the wings, when I made a blunder or two owin' to nervousness, I gave the boss every satisfaction.

"At that time the Universe company was one of the best in London. If the piece we put on was of the excitin' sort they wanted some actin', let me tell you. Some folks think fit to sneer at melodramas—well, all I says is, the plays at the old Universe was plays, with plenty o' body in 'em, not the milk-and-watery stuff that's reckoned so jolly clever nowadays.

"Every member of the Universe company was a real artiste. There was Mr. Herbert Verney, who always played the hero, a fine, manly young chap, as clever as he was good-lookin', and without a morsel o' conceit about him.

"Miss Lambert—Inez Lambert she was on the bills—was the leadin' lady. She had barely turned twenty, but, on her first appearance in public at a trial matinée,

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had made a big hit, and was at once snapped up by our manager to play principal parts. And splendid she played 'em too! the way she held the audience by her actin' was a caution. Off the stage she was a quiet sweet-tempered young lady, with a pleasant word for everybody—very different from some leadin' ladies I've known.

"The chap as played the villain styled himself Dudley Mostyn. Now in my experience I've generally found that actors who, on the stage, play wicked characters, are, in real life, the most affable gents you could wish to meet. But this Mostyn was a scowlin', surly sort both on and off the boards. He'd bully and storm at us stage-hands for the least little thing, and the look that used to come into his queer, dark eyes when he was in his tantrums often made me feel quite creepy and uncomfortable.

"You may guess Dudley Mostyn wasn't very popular with the other members o' the company. In fact, with one exception, it was a rare thing for him to speak a word to any of 'em when he was off the stage. That one exception was Miss Inez Lambert. Her, he was always a-pesterin' with his attentions. He would stand at the wings, waitin' for her to make her exit, and try to do the agreeable in his surly way. But it was easy to see that she not only disliked the chap, but was reg'lar frightened of him.

"However, nothin' particular happened until one night, when Mostyn stopped Miss Lambert just as she was leavin' the theatre, and, takin' her a bit rough by the arm, told her he meant to say all that was in his mind. With that, he starts to talk about lovin' her madly, and then bluntly asked her to be his wife. The stage-door keeper overheard it all, and told us afterwards.

"'Release my arm, sir!' was all the frightened young lady could reply.

"'Not till you promise!' says Mostyn. 'I can't live without you, Inez! If you refuse me, I swear no one else shall have you. Promise! promise!'

"'Are you mad, Mr. Mostyn?' answers Miss Lambert, strugglin' to free herself.

"Then she caught sight of the man's face, and somethin' in its expression must have terrified her, for she gave a cry for help.

"The stage-door keeper thought it about time to interfere; but, just then, out comes Herbert Verney, the 'juvenile lead.' Seein' how matters stood, he rushes up to Mostyn, and catching him by the collar, says:

"'You cowardly brute! What d'you mean by this?'

"Mostyn instantly lets go o' Miss Lambert, and hits out at Verney. But the young chap was too quick for him, and next moment Mostyn was sprawlin' on the ground, Verney havin' landed him one just between the eyes.

"By the time he got on his feet again, several members of the company had gathered round, I saw Mostyn myself; he face was white as a sheet, and his eyes flashed with fury. All he did, however, was to look hard at Verney, and say very quietly:

"'You shall pay for this, you cur!' after which he walked away just as he might have done in a blessed drama.

The next moment Mostyn was sprawling on the ground.

"Of course, the manager of the Universe heard about the affair, and at first he thought about sackin' Mostyn. But Mostyn was a grand actor, and it wasn't easy just then to find a man to fill his place. So he stayed on, and as he didn't attempt to molest Miss Lambert again the matter gradually blew over.

"Two or three months went by, and at last notices went up for *Secret Foes*, which piece had been runnin' for nearly a year. About the same time, the news went round that Herbert Verney and Inez Lambert had agreed to get spliced as soon as the play was withdrawn, and then go honeymoonin' until they was wanted for the new autumn production.

"The news didn't affect Dudley Mostyn much—at least, if it did, he didn't show it. He went through his part in *Secret Foes* in fine style—and what a part his was, to be sure! The character he took was that of a mysterious Frenchman, named Leon Girard, who was such a murderin' sort o' fiend that he was also known as 'The Destroyer.'

"All through the piece this precious villain was busy makin' trouble for Cecil Forster, the handsome young English hero, and of course, as generally happens in dramas, both of 'em loved the same beautiful gal. I don't need to mention that Mr. Verney played the hero, and Miss Lambert the beautiful gal.

"Now, in the last act of *Secret Foes* Leon Girard and Cecil Forster have a big scene

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to themselves, which ends in the villain dashin' what he thinks to be vitriol into the hero's eyes. But it isn't vitriol, for a foreign lady whom 'The Destroyer' has wronged, has managed to substitute a little bottle of harmless water for the one containing the vitriol.

"Well, the last night of 'Secret Foes' arrived, and there was a tolerable-full house to witness the performance. There wasn't none o' the slackness you sometimes see at such a time. Actors and actresses did their work as though it was the opening night of the piece. Dudley Mostyn, especially, was in tip-top form.

"But, as the play went on, it suddenly struck me that there was somethin' very strange about the chap. He acted first-rate, as I've said, but there seemed to be somethin' more than actin' in the expression of his eye and the curious twitchin' of his features.

"The curtain went up for the last act, and I was gettin' my limes ready for use, when I noticed Mostyn standin' just underneath me, a-waitin' to make his entrance. There wasn't anythin' unusual in that, o' course; but about his behaviour there was. Forgettin' that 'Mr. Limes' was only a few feet above him, Mostyn kept on sayin' softly to himself: 'She shall marry a blind man!—she shall marry a blind man!'

"Over and over again he repeated them words, and I could see that, under his 'make-up,' his face was workin' like a maniac's.

"Presently, he gets his cue and goes on for his big scene with the hero. It was a dark scene—that is to say, the footlights was lowered and I had to turn the white 'lime' on the pair as they faced each other in the middle o' the stage.

"As they stood there quarrellin', I happened to catch a glimpse o' Mostyn's eyes. The look there was in 'em almost made me drop my box. I ain't no hand at descriptions—all I can say is, that if ever there was murder in a man's eyes, there was in Mostyn's.

"A minute or two passed; then, as the end of the scene approached, 'The Destroyer' gave a screech of laughter, and whipped out of his pocket the little bottle which he supposes to hold vitriol.

"It may have been the laugh that did it. He had never laughed in that awful way before. But whatever it was, I no sooner heard the laugh and see him with the bottle in his hand, than I understood the true meanin' o' them words as wasn't in the play—'She shall marry a blind man!'

"He had his fingers round the cork, and, in another moment, he would have pitched the contents o' the bottle into Verney's eyes; but before he could do so, I suddenly turned the red limelight full on his face.

"The strong glare dazed him, and he took a step or two backwards to escape it. But I kept the light full on him, and whispered to one o' my mates below:

"'Ring down, Joe, and collar that chap Mostyn!'

"The curtain came down with a rattle, and a couple o' the scene-shifters got hold of Mostyn, who shouted and struggled like a madman. Then I was called upon to explain my queer conduct."

The strong glare dazed him, and he took a step backward to escape it.

Sam Phipps paused a moment, and resumed:

"It turned out to be exactly what I thought. The bottle was found to contain not water, but vitriol—enough of it to eat away a dozen pair of eyes!

"Mostyn was taken straight from the theatre to a lunatic asylum. He died a few months after—raving mad.

"This ticker o' mine," concluded "Mr. Limes," as he proudly displayed a massive gold repeater, "was a present from Mr. Herbert Verney. He's still a leading actor, as most of you know. Miss Inez Lambert retired from the profession shortly after she became Mrs. Verney."

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THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN THE WORLD.

I.

"And they tell me, Jack, that you are married," I said, after the slight embarrassment of a meeting between old chums who had not seen each other in ten years was over and we were comfortably seated before a noble fire in his handsome library.

"Yes," he answered quietly.

I laughed long and heartily.

"The idea!" I exclaimed. "You, the cynical bachelor, the scorner of domestic bliss, the scoffer at women; you of all men—you married."

He did not reply, and I thought, correctly, that I had offended him, so presently I continued:

"Tell me how it came about?"

"A case of love at first sight," he answered.

"Nonsense," I answered. "Every man who falls in love calls it a matter of love at first sight. It is a pretty compliment that he likes to make his wife, and there is a little bit of vanity in the statement—shows what a susceptible heart he did have, after all. Nonsense! According to Gautier there is recorded in the books of the sages but one case of death from love—they have still to record an authentic case of love at first sight. Nonsense, again I say, because there is but one woman in the world with whom any man of your intelligence, experience, and ideas could fall in love at first sight, and that woman all men fell in love with. A fleeting glimpse of her, even though her face be hidden by a veil, and the man is mad for ever after. I have seen her once. I have spent eight years hunting for her all over the world. I am mad."

"Who is she?" he asked.

"I know her by no other name than The Most Beautiful Woman in the World. That is what we called her, we Bohemians, ten of us, who saw her at the opera in Paris one night eight years ago. Not a man in the house saw or heard the opera from looking at her; not a woman from jealousy of her. Verily, I believe the conductor would have requested her to withdraw had he not looked round and caught sight of her himself. Villars—you remember Villars, the cleverest artist among the youngsters when we were pretending to study art—Villars made sketches of her on his cuffs and went crazy trying, with their aid and his memory, to reproduce her face on canvas——"

"Absinthe," said Jack, laconically.

"Never more mistaken in your life," I answered; "absolute despairing love. De Lessac, the poet—he was one of us—has been trying to write a poem about her ever since. Has the inspiration, you know, but there are not words in the three languages he speaks which can interpret it. Not one of the ten of us who were together that night speak to each other from jealousy of the others. Your wife, no doubt, is most beautiful, and worthy of the love of a fellow as noble as you, but I hope for her sake, you will never see The Most Beautiful Woman in the World."

"You have not seen my wife yet," he answered, quietly.

"I have seen no woman since that day," I replied. "I have been conscious of their existence. I have conversed with them. I have danced with them. I have called on them and done my best all round to make myself as agreeable as possible to them under the circumstances, but I have never seen them. There is a vision of a queenly, golden-haired woman before my eyes. I can see her now as she sat in her box languidly waving an ostrich-feather fan, the only person in the house, saving her escort, who was paying any attention to the music."

"And her escort—who was he?"

"An ordinary-looking fellow whom none of us had ever seen before—a young man. At first we all of us feared that he was her husband, as he appeared to pay very little attention to her except to attend upon her, but of late I have come to the conclusion that he was merely a hired attendant."

"And they disappeared entirely?"

"As though from the face of the earth. They had never been seen before; they have never been seen since. I myself ransacked Paris for another sight of her. I hired detectives, I consulted with the police; it was all to no purpose. Finally I came to the conclusion that she must have been a mere visitor in Paris. I determined to seek her in the cities of Europe. I have searched them all. I can find no trace of her. I have travelled through the East. I even visited the capitals of Asia. Finally I have come to London, hopeless, but with the intention of making my search complete, at any rate."

"Perhaps she is dead."

"Don't suggest it—although I have thought of that myself. Either dead or in a convent."

"Poor fellow," he said, "I have been all through it myself; but the cases are somewhat different. I could not have escaped seeing my wife had I tried my best. In fact I didn't even have to propose to her."

"Lucky dog," I exclaimed. "I suppose the circumstances must have been more or less romantic?"

"Decidedly romantic," he answered.

"Tell me about them."

"I will," he said, "for several reasons. In the first place it will be a short history of my life since we parted and it will prepare you——"

"Prepare me for what?"

"Prepare you for a first meeting with my wife."

"Proceed," I said.

II.

"Well," he began, "you know I came to London for the purpose of settling up my father's estate. When that had been accomplished I found myself in the possession of a modest income. I had promised you, you may remember, that as soon as the estate was settled I

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would return to our delightful old student quarters in Paris. But his affairs were complicated. It had taken a long time. I had become rather used to London society, and, frankly I liked it. The fellows at my club were pleasant, and the town is certainly gay enough for any man. Of more weight than either of these considerations, however, was the fact that I was alone in the world, and had arrived at that time in a man's life when he begins to feel the domestic impulse. In other words I wanted a wife and a home. If I were to marry anyone I wanted to marry some sweet English girl, and London was the place for me to find her in.

A vision of a queenly, golden-haired woman sitting in a box.

"She was not so easily found, though. I had made up my mind that I would never marry except for actual affection. At the same time, I wanted to choose my wife from the best society, and I confess that I rather hoped she would prove to be a girl with a moderate fortune. Several years rolled away. I made the rounds of Society, but I could not find the girl. Perhaps it was because there were too many who were equally beautiful and equally rich. Perhaps it was because I could not get well enough acquainted with them. I wanted rather more knowledge of the woman I was to marry than it appears men ordinarily do. I wanted to know her character thoroughly. I wanted to make sure of happiness.

"But another thought struck me one day. Perhaps it was because I myself as a *parti* was not especially attractive. Personally I would do, perhaps. My family was an old one and a good one; I was well educated and all that; but I was not by any means well off. I had enough to support me—that was all. I brooded over the thought, and the more I brooded the more I became convinced that I was being slighted more or less by my Society acquaintances.

"I know now that I was entirely wrong, but I began to take offence at fancied slights, and in a little while began to retaliate. Then, of course, my friends became one by one a little cool, and the first thing I knew I had determined that Society was even more cold and heartless than it is ordinarily supposed to be, and I began to be angry with it.

"I thought I was unlucky. I ought to have been left a fortune sufficient to carry me in the society where I belonged. For the first time in my life I thought disagreeably of my father and his ability, and for the first time in my life I was unhappy.

"In this frame of mind I made another mistake. I concluded that if money were the object in life I might as well have none at all as a paltry sufficiency. I concluded to speculate—to gamble. If I won I would make Society come to me. If I lost—well, you would have seen me again in Paris making sketches, not for amusement, but for a living. I had no difficulty in carrying out my purpose. I soon spoke of my broker in the matter-of-fact way of a man used to speculation for years. I had all sorts of luck. Now I was on top of the wave bounding along to the shore for which I had started my little craft—now I was down in the depths with but little chance of keeping her afloat. I became nervous—I lost my head. I determined on a bold stroke. I did some things that were more than questionable; and one day I did not go down to my brokers—it was unnecessary.

"On that day I lay in bed trying hard to determine what to do—trying hard to regain my reason, my mental balance. I was sure of but one thing, which was, that I was not only ruined financially, but if I could save my honour I would consider myself lucky. I went out into the country and stayed a week at a farmhouse. Then I came back quite as unstrung as ever. I found on my return that a certain messenger, who would not state his business, had called for me regularly three times a day since my departure. I knew what that meant. It was about my business affairs. My creditors were after me, and there was no escape except an ignominious flight to the Continent.

"I tell you, old man, it was awful! I had almost determined on flight to get out of the dilemma when the messenger was announced again. At first I thought of sending him away with the information that I had not returned. Then the cowardice of the act occurred to

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me, and I had him sent up to my room. I was a trifle surprised when I saw him. He was a house-servant, and spoke with a strong French accent. He handed me a note which proved to be a polite but urgent invitation to call as soon as possible at the residence of the writer—a gentleman by the name of Du Tasi—on a matter of importance both to him and to me.

"At first I suspected that it was some matter of business connected with my unfortunate downfall. But surely I had never met nor had any dealings with a man of that name. I looked in the directory. His name was not in it. I began to be interested in the affair, and told the messenger that I would call that evening.

"Accordingly, after my dinner I strolled up to the number mentioned in the note, and found the house to be in the most fashionable neighbourhood of the West End. I was politely shown into the parlour, and before I had time to really appreciate the magnificence of the furnishings of the room was confronted by a tall, white-haired man, who was strikingly handsome. I at once attempted to determine to what nationality he belonged, but found it impossible. He had many of the graces of a Frenchman and the haughtiness of an Englishman, while his name was apparently that of a Pole. Although a man of advanced age, and somewhat weak, he bore himself erect and commandingly.

"It was a queer meeting. I looked at him wonderingly as he looked critically at me, and there was not a word spoken for several minutes by either of us. Finally, in my embarrassment I asked him what had given me the honour of an introduction to his house, and you may imagine my amazement, when he replied, in a most matter-of-fact way:

"'I wish you to marry my daughter.'

"I looked at him in such astonishment that he went on to say, in rather a haughty manner:

"'You need not consider me insane. I am fully aware that I am startling you, but I have my own reasons for presenting the matter to you in this manner.'

"'I feel,' said I, replying with a little haughtiness myself, 'that you offer me a great and'—sarcastically—'unusual honour; but I had not been intending to marry for some time yet, and really had intended, when I did choose a wife, to marry a woman whom I loved. It may have occurred to you that I have never seen your daughter, that such an extraordinary marriage would result very unhappily for both of us, that perhaps I may not be worthy of her, that, perhaps, humble as I am, she may not be——'

"'That will do,' he broke in, angrily. 'Do not say anything for which you may feel sorry in the future. I agree with you that I do not think you worthy of her, but as she loves you I intend that you shall marry her.'

"'Loves me?' I said, in astonishment.

"'Loves you,' he repeated.

"'But,' I exclaimed, 'I have never even met her!'

"'That is true,' he answered, 'and you never shall even see her until you have decided whether or not you will accept this offer of her hand in marriage.'

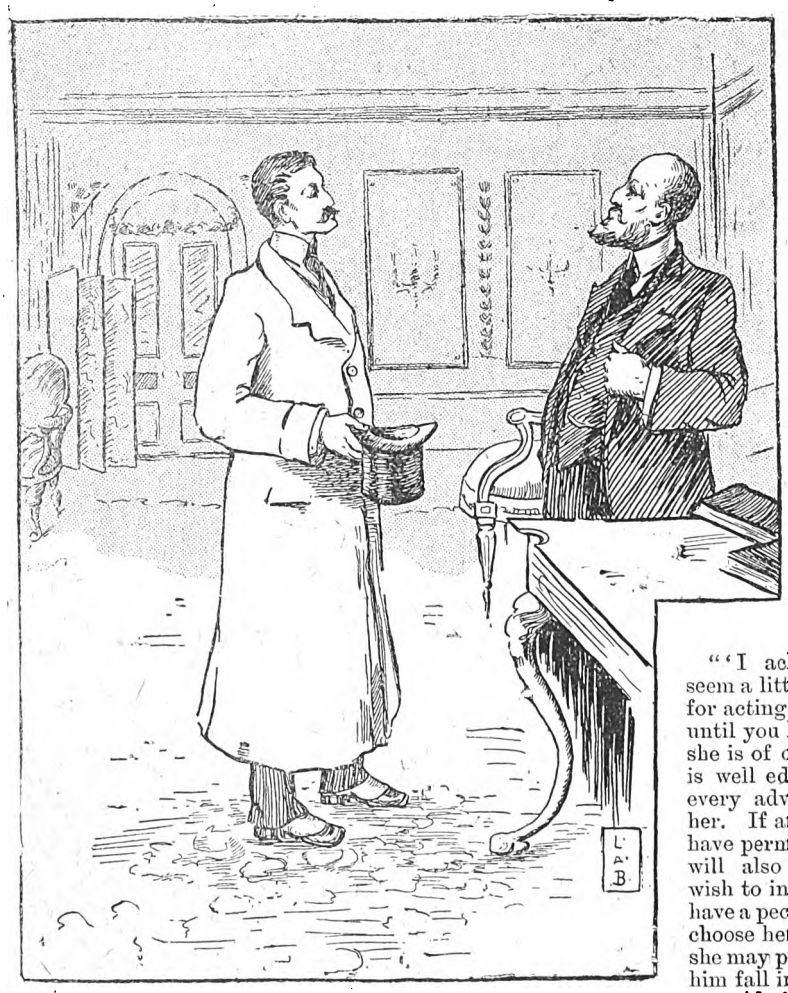
"'I decline emphatically,' I said.

"He did not appear to notice what I said, but continued:

"'I acknowledge that this proceeding may seem a little strange to you, but I have my reasons for acting as I do. While you may not see her until you have decided, I will tell you this much; she is of one of the best families in Europe; she is well educated, young, an heiress, and has had every advantage that immense wealth can give her. If any of these things are not true you will have permission to break the engagement. You will also be furnished every opportunity you wish to inquire into them. I will also say that I have a peculiar reason for wishing her husband to choose her before he sees her—in other words, that she may pick out the man whom she loves, and let him fall in love with her afterwards if he can——'

"'Ah, if he can,' I echoed. 'Suppose she is not beautiful.'

"'That is precisely the point I wish to keep



"I wish you to marry my daughter."

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from you. If she loves her husband she will be easily governed by him, and she will be happy——'

"'While if he loves her——'

"'And she knows it, she may not.'

"'But suppose the husband she chooses in such a remarkable manner falls in love with her after the marriage?'

"'She need not know it.'

"'Frankly,' I said, 'I believe you are a trifle insane.'

"'No,' he answered, 'not in the least. I merely know a great deal about human nature. I know what heredity

She was standing there.

and circumstance did when they united in my daughter and I know what is best for her. I wish her to be happy and——'

"'And you are willing to sacrifice the happiness of the man she loves in order to make her happy.'

"'The man who marries my daughter, sir,' he answered, will be very happy.'

"'That may be,' I said, 'but I decline to be a party to any experiment in marriage.'

"Again he did not seem to notice what I had said.

"'The offer of her hand, her choice of you is a great compliment. I have taken her round the world. She has seen men of every description, and has known the history of the life of every man in whom she took any interest. Although none of them talked with her, thought of her, she has known them as thoroughly as it is possible for detective skill to find out the actual character of a man. She knows every step you have taken, everything you have done for the past three months, when I may add, we arrived in London.'

"I blushed hotly. Did she know—did he know—the verge of ruin on which I was standing? Was it possible that any young girl could love a man who was so hopelessly in the depths of despair as I? I tried to hide my embarrassment by asking:

"'Where, if you please, did she ever see me?'

"'In many places and at many times,' he answered.

"'I do not see,' I laughed in rather a shamefaced way, 'what she can see to love in me.'

"'Love is decidedly the strangest thing in the world,' he answered.

"'Does she know that I am—that I am penniless!' I asked.

"'She does.'

"'Does she know that I am worse than penniless—that I am almost dishonoured?' I cried.

"'But you are not dishonoured,' he answered, 'although I must confess that you have been as imprudent as most young men are at some time or other in their lives.'

"'Ah! she does not know it all then?' I said.

"'More than you do,' he answered.

"'What do you mean?'

"'I mean that your debts have all been paid—that you have money in the bank—that your credit has been restored. By the way'—here he put his hand in his pocket—'here are some papers, cancelled notes and a cheque that was dishonoured. They belong to you. Take them.'

"I was—well, you may imagine the condition of my mind. I began to think that I had suddenly become insane. I could not speak. He saw my condition, and kindly taking me by the arm led me to the door.

"'Go back to your club and think it over. Come to-morrow and tell me your answer. There is one thing, by the way, that you need not fear. I am playing no trick upon you. If you do not find that I have told you the truth in every particular you need not consider yourself under obligation to marry her.'

III.

"I WENT back to my club, and I tried to think it over. But what can a man think under such circumstances as those?

"It all seemed like a sixteenth century romance. Why did he want me to marry a woman I had never seen? I repeated the question a thousand times as I paced back and forth in my room.

"Was she repulsive in appearance? Was she—well, there were a thousand things that suggested themselves to me. At last, however, I came to my senses. Of course, I would not marry her. The proposition was absurd. Why should I go blindfolded into a marriage? Why should I permit myself to be bought with a few cancelled notes? I would make him take them back. I would see that he got back his money. And I would tell him again that I would not consider such a proposition.

"This conclusion brought back my equanimity, and I went to bed and slept soundly. The next morning I

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called on him again. He greeted me with a smile, and for some time evaded the subject of the marriage. He gave me time to appreciate the beauty of the room, the taste with which the furniture was arranged, the elegance of the whole, and last, to notice that a portrait—a life-size portrait—was turned towards the wall, a fact that I had indistinctly noticed the day before. It was a picture of his daughter, of course. I would have given ten years of my life to have had a glimpse of it. I began wondering if, after all, she were not beautiful. I began picturing her to myself. Surely they would not put in that room a portrait of a homely girl. I began to feel just a little bit romantic. I thought I heard the rustle of a dress behind a curtain at the end of the room. I was sure I heard it. Beyond a doubt she was there. She who—well, it was hard to believe—but she who had fallen in love with me before I had ever spoken a word to her or thought a word of her. She who wanted to dower me with wealth and position, and perhaps beauty. It was the most tantalising situation imaginable. What was it to her I began to wonder? If she actually loved me what were her feelings as she stood behind that *portière* waiting for me to say yes or no? Would her heart throb with pleasure if I said yes? Would she go to her room and weep if I said no? Surely I had the better of the position, because so far as the heart was concerned, at least it was a matter of indifference to me. All these things flitted through my mind as I tried to carry on the conversation with her handsome father.

"Finally, however, I concluded that it were better to bring the thing to a conclusion at once.

"I arose. He understood merely from the action that I had concluded to decline, and he turned and looked away, almost sadly, I thought, and I fancied I heard him sigh. Again, too, I heard the rustle of the dress.

"'I feel deeply honoured,' I began, 'by your remarkable offer. I am truly grateful for your generosity in giving me financial assistance, but I can——'

"There had been no other sound than that of my own voice, but I knew, I was conscious of the fact that the *portière* at the end of the room had been drawn aside, and I knew that she was standing there revealed. I looked quickly in her direction. Well—I don't know how to describe it. I don't know how to describe her beauty. I don't know how to describe the sensation that came over me, except that it was love—love at first sight. She was standing there with her beautiful eyes beseeching me to say yes. I could read it just as plainly as though she had spoken the prayer in words. Her arms were outstretched to me, and she was blushing. I tell you, it was irresistible. I turned to her father and said:

"'I accept.'"

Here Jack ended his story.

"What was her father's reason for acting as he did?" I asked him.

"A very sensible one," he replied. "She was so rich and so beautiful that any man would have married her, and any man would have pretended love for her in order to marry her."

"But I thought he did not want her husband to love her?"

"Not at all. He did not want her husband to fall in love with her, or to say he was in love with her until after he had practically become possessed of her fortune and her hand. In other words, he wanted honest love on both sides, and he got it."

"When shall I see her?"

"Now. I can always tell the rustle of her dress after that experience, and I hear it in the next room. She is going into the conservatory to cut some flowers. We will take a look at her before she sees us. Come."

We tip-toed cautiously into the next room. A door from it opened into the conservatory. Standing in that doorway we saw her as she stooped slightly over a rose almost as beautiful as herself.

"Well old man," said Jack, "What do you think? Is she as beautiful as The Most Beautiful Woman in the World?"

Fortunately he did not see me tremble. I made a supreme effort, and said calmly:

"Quite as beautiful."

But I did not tell him that she was indeed the woman—The Most Beautiful Woman in the World.

The Romance of Elizabeth.

By RAWSON REED.

Her name, Elizabeth Friedheim, was German. Her blue eyes and flaxen hair were German. But there was nothing of the Teutonic repose in her manner, and her way of whistling at her work and executing little dance steps across the kitchen when she thought Mrs. Pratt was not looking, did not indicate Teutonic solidity of character.

Mrs. Pratt was afraid at first that she would not do by any means, particularly when, on the second evening of Elizabeth's engagement, she found a young man in the kitchen, whose cleanliness and almost shininess left no doubt of his character of "beau."

Still, Elizabeth seemed to be conducting herself with the utmost propriety, the young man left early, so Mrs. Pratt said nothing at the time.

The next day, however, she thought she would mention it, and she said, in a mild, motherly sort of way, that she did not want the young man there too often—not oftener than once a week at any rate.

Elizabeth laughed, and said that she did not want him too often, either, and she thought that once a week was too often, so Mrs. Pratt went away feeling satisfied.

So far as the work was concerned she certainly had nothing to complain of. Of course the girl was a new broom, but the way she took hold of things, the quickness and thoroughness with which they were done, and the neatness and order that seemed to descend upon the flat were exceptional.

Mrs. Pratt had been suffering from a long series of transient incompetents, who had lined her brow with

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care and turned three hairs nearly grey. She still felt apprehensive, though, and her foreboding was increased when in the course of the afternoon she found Elizabeth out on the back porch chatting pleasantly with the caretaker, who appeared to be enjoying the conversation immensely.

That evening Mrs. Pratt heard a sound of laughter proceeding from the kitchen, and, having some natural feminine curiosity, she went out to see what was happening.

It was another clean and shiny young man sitting on the kitchen table and swinging his heels, while Elizabeth swung hers from a seat on the table and ate chocolates out of a paper bag.

Mrs. Pratt went back into the parlour in a frame of mind, and told Mr. Pratt that he would have to call at the registry-office the next morning and see if he couldn't find another girl.

"Why, what's the trouble, now?" asked Pratt.

"Well, she's got the second one in there now; one isn't enough for her and I simply will not have that sort of thing going on every night, anyway. She can't carry on with young men and give proper attention to her work, and, besides, it isn't proper for a young girl. I spoke to her about it yesterday, and that seems to be all the good it did."

"Now, look here," said Pratt, "perhaps it isn't the girl's fault at all. To look at her I should say that it wasn't; you know how that is yourself."

"I don't know anything of the kind."

"Perhaps you don't. I know it was a cold night when I first went to see you and didn't find anyone there, and I know that you told me that you couldn't help it, so I'm making the same allowance for the girl."

Mrs. Pratt said he was talking nonsense, and he didn't make allowances at all, and it wasn't anything of the kind, anyway; but she was mollified to a certain extent, and said she would take her husband's advice and wait a little while before she did anything rash.

She was glad that she had come to that decision the next morning, for the breakfast was punctual and everything was so nicely cooked that even Pratt expressed his satisfaction, and as a general thing Pratt is hard to satisfy at breakfast time.

Then the subsequent sweeping, dusting, washing and scouring were all as well done, as it is possible to do those things, and through it all Elizabeth whistled like a nightingale.

It was that way from that time forth. Work was done to perfection, and the young men came with regularity, but Elizabeth never let them interfere with her domestic duties.

There was one young man for nearly every night in the week, and it seemed that those whose turn fell on the off nights when the Pratts had company were apparently accorded the privilege of the Sunday afternoon walk.

How the girl managed them so well Mrs. Pratt confessed was a mystery to her, and Pratt said that if it was a mystery to her it must be a mystery indeed.

Then subsequent benefits were derived from the pretty little maid's knack of managing.

If anything that the groceryman or the milkman brought to the house was not what Elizabeth considered it should be, that groceryman or milkman or other man took it back with absolute enthusiasm and was forthcoming with the proper article within the shortest possible space of time. It was simply marvellous.

Sometimes Mrs. Pratt felt it her duty to remonstrate with the girl concerning her coquetry, but Elizabeth only laughed.

She was always laughing.

"It does them good," she said. "If they did not like it they would not come any more, so it is good for them and good for me."

When Mrs. Pratt told her husband about this he was seriously concerned.

"I should have thought you would have known better than that," he said. "Just as long as she keeps the lot going we are all right. If she had only one I should be frightened. Let her alone; she's all right. And I think, by the way, that we might manage to put another ten shillings a month on her wages."

That, Mrs. Pratt said, was just the way you might expect a man to look at such things—just as long as he was comfortable he was willing to wink at iniquity. Nevertheless the lady did begin to think she might have said too much and the prospect of Elizabeth settling to a "one and only," marrying and leaving them, was not pleasant. So she felt impelled to express to her domestic the hope that she would not let one of those young men run away with her.

"You need not be afraid," laughed Elizabeth. "Now, I have a good time, and if I marry—well, I have seen some people who have married and I am not in a hurry. I have my good time first, anyway."

Sometimes one of Elizabeth's beaux dropped off, either discouraged or dismissed, but there was always another to take his place, and it afforded the Pratts quite a little amusement to note the changes.

One evening Mrs. Pratt went into the kitchen and found a newcomer, who seemed to be of a different stamp from the others—not so clean or neat, and older, but a good-looking fellow enough, and of a breadth and stature that seemed to make the kitchen shrink. He rose to his feet at the lady's entrance and made an awkward bow, and Mrs. Pratt noticed for the first time that Elizabeth blushed.

For two or three weeks this giant called at his appointed time; then he came twice in one week. The second time this happened the Pratts heard voices raised in anger—male voices—and then the sound of a scuffle and a scream from Elizabeth.

Pratt jumped up and ran into the kitchen just as the outer door slammed, and found Elizabeth with the bloom fled from her face confronting her latest admirer, who stood with his back to the door scowling at her.

"What does this mean?" demanded Pratt.

Elizabeth began to cry and the giant stood sullen and silent.

"Whatever it is," continued Pratt, "I won't have it. Get out of this house and don't let me find you here again. I don't want to have any trouble with you, but I tell you to get out."

For an instant the big man hesitated; then he turned, and with a parting scowl at the girl opened the door and disappeared.

Pratt attempted to question Elizabeth, but she would do nothing but cry, and at last he gave it up and went back and told his wife that he thought Elizabeth's management had failed for once, and two had called at the same time with the result of the survival of the fittest.

It is probable that he was right.

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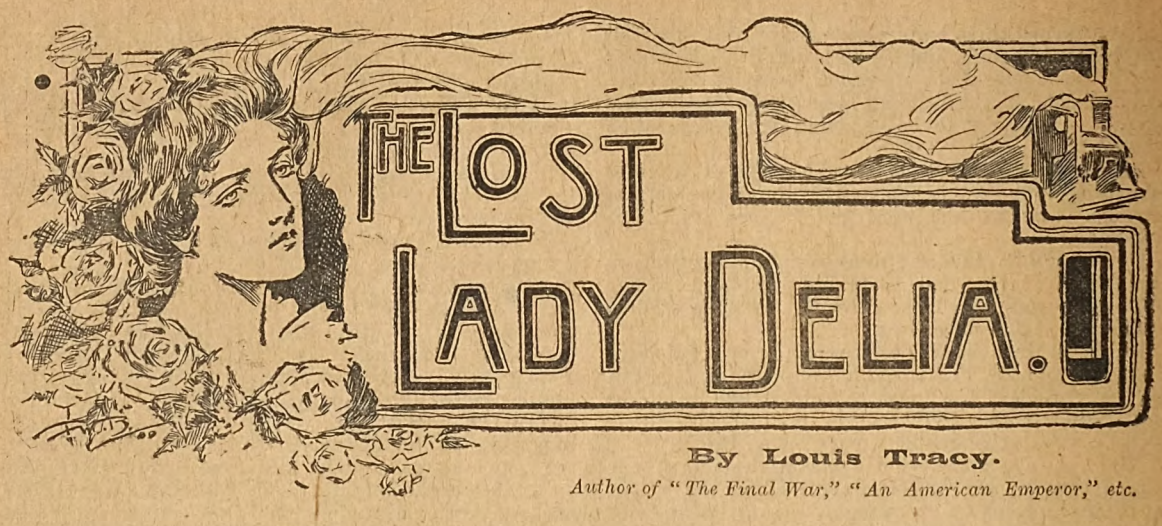

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

CHAPTER XXIII. (*continued*).

"Pooh! The mania of an hysterical woman!"

"Possibly!"

"Why 'possibly'? Do you for a moment believe the monstrous insinuation?"

"No, not in that sense. But her brother was about to make some revelation regarding a third person when she appealed to him not to speak. What would have happened finally I do not know. At that critical moment my servant announced your arrival."

"But what can Mrs. Hilmer have to conceal? She and her brother have been lost from Society since long before my marriage. Neither of them has, to my knowledge, ever set eyes on my wife during the last seven years."

"Yet Mrs. Hilmer *must* have had some powerful motive in acting as she did."

"Is it not more likely that she had a bad attack of nerves?"

"A woman who merely yields to nervous prostration behaves foolishly. This woman gave way to emotion, it is true, but it was strength, not weakness, that sustained her."

"What do you mean?"

"There is but one force that sustains in such a crisis—the power of love. Mrs. Hilmer was not flying from consequences. She met them half-way in the spirit of a martyr."

"'Pon my honour, Brett, I am beginning to think that this wretched business is affecting your usually clear brain. You are accepting fancies as facts."

"Maybe. I confess to feeling unequal to form a logical conclusion to-night."

"Why not abandon the whole muddle to time? There is no solution of a difficulty like the almanac. Let us both go off somewhere."

"What, and leave Mrs. Hilmer to die of sheer pain of mind? To let this unfortunate fellow, Mensmore, suffer no one knows what consequences from the events of to-day? It is out of the question."

"Very well, I leave you to it. Everyone seems to forget that it is I who suffer most." The baronet stood up and dejectedly gazed into the fire.

"I, at least, can feel for you, Lyle," said Brett sympathetically, "but you must admit that things cannot be allowed to remain in their present whirlpool."

"So be it. Let them go on to their bitter end. If my wife was tired of my society she might at least have got rid of me in an easier manner."

With this trite reflection Sir Charles quitted his friend's house.

Brett sat for a long time motionless. Then, as his mind became calmer, he lit a cigar, took out the doubly mysterious letter, and examined it in every possible way, critically and microscopically.

There could be no doubt that it was a genuine production. The condition of the ink bore out the correctness of the date, and the fact that the note-paper and envelope were not of Continental style was not very material.

It did not appear to have been inclosed in another envelope, as the writer implied, for the purpose of being reposted in London. Rather did the slightly frayed edges of the cover give rise to the assumption that it had been carried in someone's pocket before postage. But this theory was vague and undemonstrable.

The handwriting was Lady Delia's; the style, allowing for the strange conditions under which it was written, was hers; yet Brett did not believe in it.

Nothing could shake his faith in the one solid, concrete certainty that stood out from a maze of contradictions and mystery—Lady Delia Lyle was dead, and buried in a pauper's grave at Putney.

At last, wearied with thought and unsatisfactory theorising, he went to bed; but Smith sat up late to regale his partner with the full, true, and particular narrative of the "lydy a-cryin' on her knees, and the strange gent lookin' as though he would like to murder Mr. Winter."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE HANDWRITING.

LIKE most men, Reggie took a different view of events in the morning to that which he entertained overnight.

Yesterday, the surprises of the hour were concrete embodiments, each distinct and emphatic. To-day they were merged in the general mass of contradictory details that made up this most bewildering inquiry.

That matters could not be allowed to rest in their present state was clear; that they would, in the natural course of things, reveal themselves more definitely, even if unaided, was also patent.

Mrs. Hilmer's partial admissions, her brother's evident knowledge of some salient features of the puzzle, that utterly strange letter in the admitted handwriting of Lady Delia herself, and bearing the prosaic testimony of dates stamped by the Post-office—these sensational elements, when brought into juxtaposition, could not help reacting into additional phases.

Long experience in criminal investigation told Brett that, under certain circumstances, the best course of all was one of inaction.

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On the basis of the accepted truism in the affairs of many people that "letters left unanswered answer themselves," the barrister knew that there must be an outcome from the queer medley of occurrences at his residence on the Monday evening.

Reviewing the history of the past three months several oddities stood out from the general jumble.

In the first place he wondered why he had failed to deduce any pertinent fact from the manner in which Mrs. Hilmer's dining-room was furnished on the occasion of his first visit to Raleigh Mansions.

He distinctly remembered noting his reception in an unusual room littered with unusual articles, when the luxurious and well-appointed suite of apartments was considered as a whole. It was suggested to him at the time that the drawing-room, which he saw during his second visit, was dismantled earlier, but he did not connect this trivial incident with the feature in Mensmore's flat that he noted immediately—namely, the discrepancies between the arrangement of his sitting-room and all other chambers in the place.

These things were immaterial now, but he indexed them as a guide for future use.

Lady Delia's motive for that secret visit to Raleigh Mansions—that was the key of the mystery. But how to discover it? Who was her confidant? To whom could he turn for possible enlightenment? It was useless to broach the matter again to Sir Charles Lyle. The baronet and his wife had been friends sharing the same *ménage* rather than husband and wife. Lady Delia's relatives had already been appealed to in vain. They knew nothing of the slightest value in this search for truth.

In this train of thought the name of Jane Harding cropped up. She was the personal maid of the deceased lady. She had sharp eyes and quick wits. Her queer antics shortly after the inquest were not forgotten. Here at least was a possibility of light if the girl would but speak.

If she refused what could be her motive?

Anyhow it was worth while to make a fresh effort.

Early in the afternoon Brett called at the stage-door of the Jollity Theatre.

"Is Miss Marie le Marchant still employed here?" he asked the attendant.

"I dunno," was the careless answer.

"Well, think hard," said the barrister, laying a half-crown on the battered blotting-pad which is an indispensable part of the furniture in the letter bureau at a theatre.

"Yes, sir, I believe she is, but she has been away on a week's leave."

"Indeed. Has she returned?"

"I was off last night, sir, but if you will pardon me a moment I'll inquire from the man who took my place."

The stage-doorkeeper disappeared into the dark interior, to return quickly with the information that Miss Le Marchant had appeared as usual on the Monday night.

"She was away most part of last week, sir," added the man, "and I believe it wasn't on a holiday, as she was a-sort of flurried about it as if someone was ill."

"Thank you. Do you know where she lives?"

A momentary hesitation was soon softened by another half-crown.

"It's against the rules, sir. If you were to find yourself near Jubilee-buildings, Bloomsbury, you would not be far out."

This information was sound. Miss Marie le Marchant's name was painted outside a second-floor flat.

Brett knocked, and the door was opened by an elderly woman whom he had no difficulty in recognising.

"Is your daughter in, Mrs. Harding?" he said.

For a moment she could not speak for surprise.

(*Continued on page* 314.)

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If you have rheumatism, write to me, and I will send you, free of cost, a trial package of a harmless remedy, which cured me and thousands of others, among them cases of over fifty years' standing. It is a grand remedy, and in order that every suffering reader may learn about it, I will gladly send them a Trial Package free, even if more than 25,000 invalids should apply. Many a distressing case of rheumatism, among them some which defied Hospital, Drugs, Electricity, and medical skill, were successfully cured. In Denham, Ind., U.S.A., it cured a lady, who then cured fifteen of her neighbours. In Prosser, Nebr., U.S.A., it cured Mrs. C. Morritz, who had been afflicted for fifty-two years. In Fountain City, Wis., U.S.A., it cured Hon. Jacob Sexauer, after suffering for thirty-three years, notwithstanding having employed seven physicians. At 130 Oak Street, Vincennes, Ind., U.S.A., this remedy rescued Miss Emma Callender from a case of rheumatism, which her physicians considered fatal. Rev. C. Sund, of Harrisville, Wis., U.S.A., testifies that this remedy cured two members of his congregation, one who had suffered eighteen, the other twenty-five years. In England the following have written me cordial letters of thanks, and testify that they have been completely cured of rheumatism through Gloria Tonic: J. E. Smith, of Ranskill, Notts; Mrs. C. Gregory, of South Woodford, Essex; Mr. W. Booth, of Dudley, near Huddersfield; Miss Mary Fullon, of Bally Truckle; Mrs. Henry Bester, of Weldon, near Daventry. Thousands of similar instances could be mentioned where this horrible plague has been completely cured. Write at once for a free trial package and other information, for it is an honest remedy that you can test before you part with your money. Be sure and write your name plainly and give your full address, to avoid any mistakes in delivery. Mr. Smith's principal offices are in Germania Building, Milwaukee, Wis., U.S.A., but for the convenience of the British public he has also opened London offices. Address all letters to John A. Smith (Dept. 1007), 6 and 7 Stonecutter Street, London, E.C.

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"Well, I never," she cried, "but London is a funny place. Do you know me, sir?"

"Anyone would recognise you from your daughter, if they did not take you for her elder sister," he said. Brett's smile was irresistible.

"My daughter is not in just now, sir," replied Mrs. Harding, "but I expect her in to tea almost immediately."

"Then may I come in and await her arrival?"

"Certainly, sir."

Once inside the flat, Brett was struck by the pretentious but fairly comfortable nature of its appointments, the ex-lady's maid's legacy must have been a nice one to enable her to live in such style, as the poor pittance of a coryphée would barely pay for the rent and taxes. Moreover, the presence of her mother in the establishment was a distinct factor in her favour.

Mrs. Harding had brought the visitor to the tiny sitting-room. She seated herself near the window and resumed some sewing.

"Have you been long in town, Mrs. Harding?" said Brett, by way of being civil.

"In London, do you mean, sir? About two months. Ever since my daughter got along so well in her new profession. She's a good girl, is my daughter."

"Miss Harding is doing well on the stage, then?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Why, she's been earning £6 a week, and last week she was sent for for a special engagement, which paid her so well that she's going to buy me a new dress out of the money."

"Really," said Brett, "you ought to be proud of her."

"I am," said the admiring mother. "I only wish her brother who went off and 'listed for a sojer had turned out half as well."

Mrs. Harding nodded towards a photograph of a cavalry soldier in uniform on the mantelshelf, and Brett rose to examine it, inwardly marvelling at the intelligence he had just received. Was it reasonable that the girl could be the recipient of a legacy without the knowledge of her mother? In any case, why did she conceal the real nature of her earnings, as the story about £6 a week was a myth.

Near to the portrait of the gallant hussar was a large plaque presentment of Miss Marie herself, in all the glory of tights, wig, and make-up. Across it was written in the best theatrical style:

"Ever yours sincerely, Marie le Marchant." And no sooner had Brett caught sight of the words than he almost cried out in voluntary astonishment.

The handwriting was identical with that of Lady Lyle.

Gulping down his amazement, Brett devoured the signature with his eyes.

The resemblance was truly remarkable. What on earth could be the explanation of this phenomenon?

"Your daughter is a remarkably nice writer, Mrs. Harding," he said, turning the photograph towards her.

"Yes," said the complacent mother, "she taught herself when—before she went on the stage. She was always a clever girl, and when she grew up she improved herself. I wasn't able to afford her much schooling when she was young."

"I have seldom seen a nicer hand," went on Reggie. "Have you any other specimens of her writing convenient? I should like to see them if they are not private."

The smooth surface of the photograph might perhaps lend a deceptive fluency to the pen. He wanted to make quite sure that he was not mistaken.

"Oh, yes. She's just copying out the part of 'Ophelia' in *Hamlet*. And she acts it beautiful."

Mrs. Harding handed over a large MSS. book, and there, written on the first page, was the name of the luckless woman whose fatal passion had moved millions to tears.

The barrister seized at once on the weird coincidence that lent similitude to the two names.

The last four letters of "Ophelia" were so precisely like the same letters in the signature of Lady Delia Lyle that, without other evidence, he would have sworn, to the best of his belief, that the deceased lady herself wrote the word.

He admired Miss Marie le Marchant for her efforts in the direction of culture, but he was determined, once and for all, to get from her some explanation of her actions.

The rattle of a key in the outer door caused him to throw aside the coveted "part," and the young lady herself entered. A few weeks of stage experience had given her a more stylish appearance. There was a "professional" touch in the arrangement of her hat and the droop of her skirt.

She knew him instantly, and listened with evident anger to her mother's explanation that "this gentleman has just called to see you, dear."

"All right, mother," she cried. "I see it is Mr. Brett. Will you get tea ready whilst I talk with him? I shall be ready in two minutes." This with a defiant look at Reggie.

When Mrs. Harding had left the room her daughter said in the crisp accents of ill-temper:

"What do you want with me, now?"

"I want to ask you why you dared to write a letter to Sir Charles Lyle in the name of your dead mistress?"

The answer was so direct, the tone so menacing, its assumption of absolute and unquestioned knowledge so complete that for a moment Marie le Marchant's assurance failed her.

She stood like one petrified, with eyes dilated and breast heaving. At last she managed to ejaculate:

"I—I—why do you ask me that question?"

"Because I must have the truth from you this time. You are playing a very dangerous game."

That he was right he was now sure beyond doubt. It was impossible for the girl to deny it with those piercing eyes fixed upon her, and seeming to read the secrets of her heart.

Yet she was plucky enough. Although she was confused and on the point of bursting into tears, she snapped viciously:

"I will tell you nothing. Go away."

"You are obstinate, I know," said Brett, "but I must warn you that you are juggling with edged tools. You should not imagine that you can trifle with murder. What is your motive for deliberately trying to conceal Lady Delia's death? If you do not answer me you may be asked the question in a court of law."

"You have no right to come here annoying me," she retorted.

"I am not here to annoy you. I come, rather as a friend to appeal to you not to incur the grave risk of keeping from the authorities information which they ought to possess."

"What information?"

"The reasons which led you to leave Sir Charles Lyle's house so suddenly, the source whence you obtain your money, paid to you, doubtless, to secure your silence, the motive which impelled you to use your ability to imitate Lady Delia's handwriting in order to propagate the false news that she is alive. This is the information needed, and your wilful refusal to give it constitutes a grave indictment."

"I don't care *that* for you, Mr. Brett," replied the girl, her face set now in a scarlet temper, whilst she snapped her fingers to emphasize her words. "You can do and say what you like, I will tell you nothing."

"You cannot deny you wrote that letter to Sir Charles Lyle last Saturday?"

"I am waiting for my tea, Mr. Brett. Sorry I can't ask you to join me."

"Your flippancy will not avail you. See, here is the letter itself—your own production—written on paper of which you have a quantity in this very room."

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(*Continued on page* 316.)

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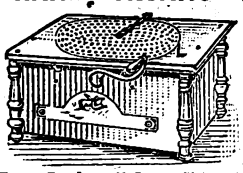

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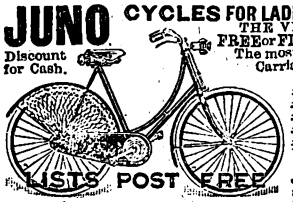

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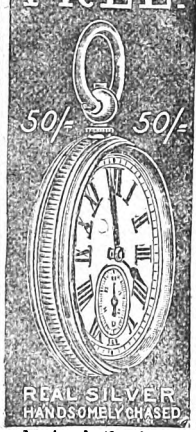

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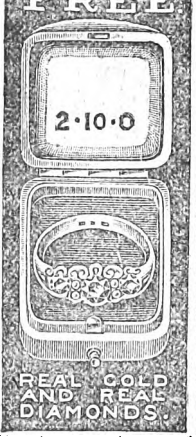

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She was staggered, almost subdued by this melodramatic production of the original, and his clever guess at the existence of similar notepaper in the house.

But her dogged temperament saved her. Jane Harding was British, notwithstanding her penchant for a French-sounding name, and she would have died sooner than beat a retreat.

"I will thank you to leave me alone, Mr. Brett," she said.

There was nothing for it but to retire as gracefully as possible, but the barrister was more than satisfied with his visit. He had now established beyond a shadow of doubt that for some reason which he could not fathom the ex-lady's maid not only knew of her mistress' death but wished to conceal it.

This desire, too, had the essential feature of every other branch of the inquiry; it grew to maturity long after the day when Lady Delia was actually killed. What did it all mean?

From Bloomsbury he went west to Portman Square, and found Sir Charles on the point of going for a drive in the Park.

He briefly told him his discovery.

The baronet at first was sceptical. "Do you mean to say, Brett," he cried fretfully, "that I do not know my wife's writing when I see it?"

"You may think you do, but when another person can imitate it exactly, of course, you may be deceived. Besides, if this girl, as is probable, was helped in her work by your wife, what is more likely than that Jane Harding should seek to copy that which she would consider the ideal of excellence. Don't harbour any delusions in the matter, Lyle. The letter you received on Monday morning was written by Jane Harding. I am sure of that from her manner no less than from the accidental resemblance of the two styles of handwriting. What I could not find out was her motive for the deceit."

"It is a queer business altogether," said Sir Charles, wearily; "I wish it were ended."

CHAPTER XXV.

Miss Phyllis Browne Intervenes.

Brett was quite positive in his belief that Jane Harding was the paid agent of some person who wished to conceal the facts concerning Lady Delia's death.

Her unexpected appearance in the field at this late hour, no less than the bold *rôle* she adopted, proved this to his satisfaction. But in England there was no torture-chamber to which she could be led and gradually dismembered until she confessed the truth.

So long as she adhered to the policy of pert denial she was quite safe. The law could not touch her, for the chief witness against her, Sir Charles Lyle, was obviously more than half inclined to admit the genuineness of the letter, even in opposition to the superior judgment of his friend.

Yet it was a matter which Brett considered ought to be made known to the police, so he sent for Mr. Winter and told him of the strange result of his interview with Miss Marie le Marchant.

"Dash everything!" cried the detective when he heard the news. "I made a note some time ago that that girl ought to be watched, but I clean forgot all about it."

"Remember," said Brett, "that my discovery was the result of pure accident. My object in visiting her was to endeavour to induce her confidence with regard to Lady Delia's former life and habits. Indeed, I handled the business very badly."

"I don't see that, sir. You got hold of a very remarkable fact, and thus prevented the success of a bold move by someone which, in my case, at any rate, nearly choked me off the inquiry."

"True. So far chance favoured me. But I ought to have been content with the assumption. There was no need to frighten her by pressing it home."

"Oh, from that point of view"—began the detective.

But Brett was merely thinking aloud—rough-shaping his ideas as they grouped themselves in his brain.

"Perhaps I am wrong there too," he went on. "If this girl is working to instructions she would have refused to help me in any way, and she already knows that I am on the trail. There is one highly satisfactory feature in the Jane Harding adventure, Mr. Winter."

"And what is that?"

"The person, or persons, responsible for Lady Delia's death know that the matter has not been dropped. They are inclined to think that the circle is narrowing. In some of our casts, Mr. Winter, we must have come so unpleasantly close to them that they deemed it advisable to throw us off the scent by a bold effort."

"No doubt you are right, sir, but I wish to goodness I knew when we were 'warm,' as I am getting tired of the business. Every new development deepens the mystery."

Mr. Winter's face was as downcast as his words.

"Surely not! The more pieces of the puzzle we have to handle the less difficult should be the final task of putting them together."

"Not when every piece is a fresh puzzle in itself."

"Why, what has disconcerted you to-day?"

"Mrs. Hilmer."

"What of her?"

"I've had another talk with the maid—her companion, you know—a girl named Dobson. It struck me that it was advisable to know more about Mrs. Hilmer than we do at present."

Brett made no comment, but he could not help the reflection that Pyne, the stranger from Wyoming, had entertained the same view.

"Well," continued the detective, "I went about the affair as quietly as possible, but the maid, though willing could not tell me much. Mrs. Hilmer, she thinks, married very young, and was badly treated by her husband. Finally, there was a rumpus, and she went on the stage, whilst Hilmer drank himself to death. He died about a year ago, but they had been separated nearly five years. He was fairly well-to-do, but he squandered all his money in dissipation, and never gave her a cent. Three years last Michaelmas she set up her present establishment at Raleigh Mansions, and there she has been ever since."

"Then where does the money come from? It must cost her at least £2,000 a year to live."

"That's just what the maid can't tell me. Her mistress led a very secluded life, and was never what you could call fast, though a very pretty woman. During this time she had only one visitor—a gentleman."

"Ah!"

"It sounds promising, but it ends in smoke, so far as I can see."

"Why?"

"This gentleman was a Colonel Montgomery—an old friend—though he wasn't much turned thirty, the maid says. He interested himself a lot in Mrs. Hilmer's affairs, looked after some investments for her, and was on very good terms with her, and nobody could whisper a word against the character of either of them. He was never there except in the afternoon, and on very rare occasions took Mrs. Hilmer, whose maid always accompanied them, to Epping Forest, or up the river, or on some such short journey."

"Go on!"

"I'm sorry, sir, but the chase is over. He's dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes. The maid doesn't know how, or when exactly but one day she found her mistress crying, and when she asked her what was the matter Mrs. Hilmer said, 'I've lost

(*Continued on page 318.*)

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my only friend." The maid said, "Surely not Colonel Montgomery, madam?' and she replied 'Yes.' She quite took on about it."

"Had the maid no idea as to the date of this interesting occurrence?"

"Only a vague one. Sometime in the autumn or before Christmas. By Jove, yes; it escaped me at the time, but she said that soon after the colonel's death another gentleman called and took her mistress out to dinner. I was so busy thinking about the colonel that I slipped the significance of that statement. It must have been you, Mr. Brett."

"So it seems." The barrister's active brain was already assimilating this new information. If a woman like Mrs. Hilmer had lost a dear and valuable friend—one who practically formed the horizon of her life—she would certainly have worn mourning for him. It was a singular coincidence that Mrs. Hilmer should have "lost" Colonel Montgomery about the same time that Lady Delia disappeared. The detective and the maid both had drawn a false inference from Mrs. Hilmer's words.

"We must find Colonel Montgomery," he said, after a slight pause.

"Find him!"

"Yes."

"I hope neither of us is going his way for some time to come, Mr. Brett," laughed the policeman.

"Winter, I shall never cure you from jumping at conclusions. Upon your present evidence Colonel Montgomery is no more dead than you are."

"But the maid said——"

"I don't care if fifty maids said. There are many more ways of 'losing' a friend than by death. Pass me the Army List, on that bookshelf behind you there."

A brief reference to the index, and Brett said:

"I thought so. There is no *Colonel* Montgomery. There are several captains and lieutenants, and a Major-General who has commanded a small island in the Pacific for the last five years, but not a single colonel. Winter, you have blundered into eminence in your profession."

"I'm glad to hear it, even as you put it, Mr. Brett. But I don't see——"

"I know you don't. If you did, a popular novelist would write your life and style you the English Lecocq. Mrs. Hilmer 'lost' the gallant colonel at the same time that the world 'lost' Lady Delia. Find the first, and I am much mistaken if we do not learn all about the second."

"Now I wonder if you are right."

The detective's eyes sparkled with animation. It was the first real clue he had hit upon, and Brett's method of complimenting him on the fact did not disconcert him.

"Of course I'm right. You have done so well with the maid that I leave her in your hands. Try the coachman and the cook. But keep me informed of your progress."

Winter rushed off elated. So persistent was he in striving to elucidate this new problem that he paid no heed for some days to the side-light furnished by Jane Harding and her exceedingly curious powers as a letter-writer.

Brett purposely left the inquiry to the policeman. He realised intuitively that the disappearance of Lady Delia would soon be explained, but he shrank from subjecting Mrs. Hilmer to the ordeal of further questioning.

His abstinence was rewarded later in the week, for Mensmore came to see him.

The young man wore an expression of settled melancholy which surprised the barrister greatly.

"Have you prevailed on your sister to take us into her confidence?" said Brett, when Mensmore was ensconced in a chair in his cosy sitting-room.

"No. She is more fixed than ever in her resolve to take the whole blame on herself."

"Surely this mistaken idea can be shaken?"

"I fear not."

"And you share it yourself?"

"I do. Bear with us, Brett. This is a terrible business. It has broken me up utterly."

"Nonsense. You are in no way concerned save to shield your sister, and no one credits her wild statements regarding complicity in this crime."

"Look here, Brett, I have come to ask you if this investigation cannot be allowed to rest. It means a lot of misery that you cannot foretell or prevent. Knowing what I do I cannot believe Lady Delia was murdered."

"Knowing what I do I can accept no other conclusion. A worthy and estimable lady leaves her home suddenly, without the slightest imaginary cause, and she is found in the Thames with a piece of iron driven into her brain whilst the medical evidence is clear that death was not due to drowning. What other inference can be drawn than that she was foully done to death?"

"Heaven help me, I cannot tell. Yet I appeal to you to let matters rest where they are if it is possible."

"It is not possible. I cannot control the police. I am merely a private agent acting on my own responsibility and on behalf of Lady Delia's relatives."

"Don't misunderstand me, Brett. I am not asking this thing on account of my sister or myself."

"On account of whom, then?"

Mensmore did not answer for a moment. He looked mournfully into the fire for inspiration.

"Perhaps I had better tell you," he said, "that I have broken off my engagement with Miss Browne."

Brett jumped up from his chair. "What the dickens do you mean?" he cried.

"Exactly what I have said. When we met on Monday night, I could not mention that Sir William and Lady Browne and their daughter travelled back to England with us. On Tuesday I saw Phyllis. In view of the shadow thrown on us by this frightful charge I thought it my duty to release her from any ties to me. If my sister has to figure in a court of law as a principal, or accomplice, in a murder case—and possibly myself with her—I could not consent to associate my poor Phyllis' name with mine. So I took the plunge."

"You are a beastly idiot," shouted Brett. "If I had the power I would give you six months' hard labour this moment. Who ever threatened to put your sister, or you, in the dock."

"You have done your best that way, you know."

"I?—I have shielded you throughout."

"I feel that. But your own admission shows that I am right. Shielded us from what? From arrest by the police, of course."

"But why take this precipitate action? What has Lady Delia's death to do with your marriage with Miss Browne?"

"That's it, Brett. I cannot explain. I just have to endure silently."

"Did you give her any reason for your absurd resolution?"

"Yes. I could have no secrets from her."

"Did you inflict all this wretched story on a woman you loved and hoped to marry."

"You may be as bitter as you like. That is my idea of square dealing at any rate. What other pretext could I invite for—for giving her up?"

Mensmore found it hard to get the words out. In his heart Brett pitied him, though he raged at this lamentable result of the only bright interlude in the whole story of death and intrigue.

"And what did Miss Browne say?"

"Oh, she just pooh-poohed the whole business and pretended to laugh at me, though she was crying all the time."

"A nice kettle of fish you have made of it," growled Brett. "You help your sister in her folly of silence and then proceed to give effect to it by ruining your own happiness and that of your affianced wife. Have you seen Miss Browne since?"

"No"

(To be continued.)

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

The new features introduced into *Short Stories* last week, viz., the tales entitled "A Keeper of Secrets" and "Tales Told Off Duty" (which, of course, you are reading) by no means exhaust our improvements. While we have, metaphorically speaking, taken off our coat in order to cope with the additional work which new features always entail, we have decided to put a new coat altogether on *Short Stories*. And very smart the new cover will look, as you will see for yourself next week. By the way, you might ask your friends to look out for it, too. And your enemies as well, for that matter, though after being introduced to *Short Stories* they could not, I feel sure, remain your enemies any longer. They would recognise at once that such a good turn deserved another, and a reconciliation would be the upshot. So you will observe that, in addition to being the best fiction paper in existence, *Short Stories* may become a royal road to good-fellowship.

❦❦❦

"Frank" of Kilburn lives away from his people, who reside in Northampton. He is on perfectly good terms with them, writes to them occasionally and sees them two or three times a year. But his "dear old dad" has a paternal bone to pick with him on the score that he doesn't write often enough. "I would write more frequently," says my correspondent, "but the fact is, I never know what to say. I stick pretty closely to my work and live a commonplace, humdrum life in which nothing happens that is worth chronicling. So I am always in a difficulty as to how to write other than a few bald sentences."

Don't worry, "Frank," but write oftener. Depend upon it, the "dear old dad" doesn't regard your letters as so many "bald sentences." It is not the details of your letters that he prizes. What he wants is to hear from you, even though yours be the briefest of epistles. For so long as he receives any communication from you he will know that he is in your thoughts. And that is a tenderly-prized reflection to the parental mind.

❦❦❦

"R. P." asks me the question as to why civil servants are uncivil.

"While," he writes, "all sorts and conditions of shopkeepers are the very incarnation of politeness, civil servants are the exact contrary. I allude more particularly to post-office clerks, who, to my mind, are the most careless, negligent and impolite body of people I have ever known. Why they are so I can't imagine. Certainly they have no sort of right to be. For when all is said they are the servants of the public, not, as they would have us suppose, the masters. Frequently, I have entered a post-office, and been kept waiting for several minutes for a penny stamp, solely because the lady behind the counter was not disposed to put down the novel she was reading, or was so engrossed in carrying on a flirtation with somebody else in the place. Nor are my charges of neglect and impoliteness confined to the female clerks. The men are equally culpable in this connection. Now, as a taxpayer, I must strongly protest against this abuse of the public funds."

❦❦❦

My correspondent is a little sweeping in his charges. I am bound to say that, although I have met post-office clerks who were not over attentive to business, I have also met those who went out of their way to be obliging. "R. P." should remember the old saying about "black sheep," and should not attack a class for the sake of a few offenders.

❦❦❦

Apropos of this subject, have you ever heard the story of Lord Rosebery and the post-office clerk? It was during his lordship's tenure of the Premiership that he one day went into a post-office to send a wire. Wishing to be quite explicit in the message, he was rather more diffuse than one is wont to be. Whereupon the clerk, who did not know Lord Rosebery, and who was of an officious character, impertinently remarked that the sender of the wire seemed to have a lot of money to waste.

❦❦❦

Lord Rosebery gave him one glance, then quickly ascertaining the name of the impudent official from another clerk, filled up a second form and addressed it to the Postmaster-General, and requested that the clerk should be removed from his position. The clerk, on seeing the signature "Rosebery" to this wire, turned white and red and white again, stammered out a dozen apologies, and behaved generally like a man who is quaking from head to foot. The upshot of it was that Lord Rosebery, after giving him one or two words of very cogent advice, promised to overlook the matter. Since that time that clerk has been one of the most polite of men.

"Terence" has a little suggestion to make which, if adopted, would do much to turn the industrial methods of the world upside down.

"I am extremely fond of outdoor sports and exercises," he writes, "but except on Saturday afternoons have very few opportunities of indulging in them. This is because I am employed in an office all day, and by the time my work is done it is too dark for *al fresco* occupations. Now what I want to suggest is this: Why should we not work at night instead of in the daytime? Start say at five p.m.; work till one a.m.; then sleep, and have the beautiful daylight in which to recreate. By such an arrangement employers would get the same number of hours from their workpeople, while the latter would have conferred upon them an inestimable boon. What glorious times one could have—a football match every afternoon."

Very likely "Terence," but you seem to forget that life is not all beer and football matches. Apart from our pleasures, there is always staring us in the face the hard grim fact that we must live, notwithstanding the satirist's remark that he didn't see the necessity. In order to live we must work, and the fittest time to work is after sleep. Just imagine, after a couple of hours at "Soccer," having to go and do eight hours work. You wouldn't like it, would you "Terence"? And there are other objections to your suggestion, if you carefully think the matter over.

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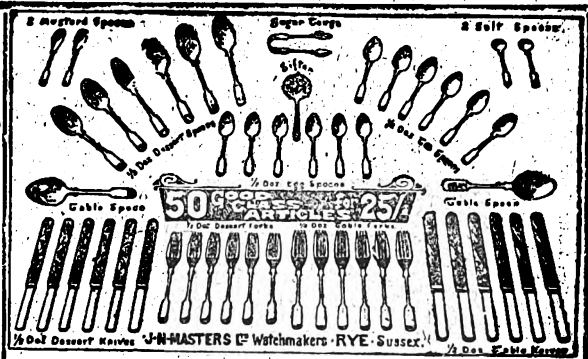

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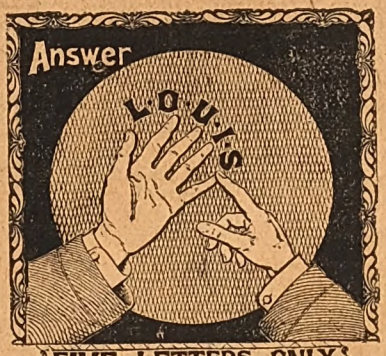

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No. 637.] For Week Ending March 16, 1901. [One Penny.

Short Stories

A Weekly Magazine for Home and Train

In a Sedan Chair

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 637.] For the Week Ending March 16th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

A Keeper of Secrets

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Being Days in the Professional Life of the late Mr. Hugo Pontifex, the Famous West-end Solicitor.

To those who had only met him casually in Society, the late Mr. Pontifex was a good-tempered mystery. Bluff, handsome, and, in spite of his middle-age, a little of a dandy, he seemed the last man in the world to deserve his reputation, which was that of the keenest, most audacious, and unerring of family lawyers. Fair-haired, and powerful as an athlete, his striking appearance was increased by his eyes, one of which was grey and one blue.

In reality, however, Hugo Pontifex had a wide and almost exclusively aristocratic practice. He seldom briefed a barrister, seldom set foot in a court of justice, but single handed he hunted down, captured, and safely buried mystery after mystery of terrible import to Mayfair and Belgravia.

An expert in strangling scandal, he lived a life of enthralling interest, and died a rich man. When his executors went through his papers they found nothing to satisfy their curiosity, though plenty to excite it. Hugo Pontifex knew the value of fire—and the dangers of ink. But from time to time he related to the writer, who enjoyed a certain measure of his confidence, the incidents which form the basis of the following stories. In speaking of these strange fragments of drama, Mr. Pontifex himself employed fictitious names, the present author being left to guess vainly at the identity of the genuine actors.

THE INCIDENT AT THE RED VILLAS.

THE window of Mr. Pontifex's private room looked out upon St. James' Street and was peculiarly high and narrow.

The blind hung always to the middle bar of the sashes, and a tall panel of wire gauze screened the apartment from the glance of the passer-by.

Mr. Pontifex, however, saw most of what went on in the famous thoroughfare, and many an actual and possible client traversed the solicitor's field of vision without dreaming how closely they had been scrutinized by the sharpest eyes in London.

As Mr. Pontifex, early one bright October morning, sat opening his letters, he was aware that, on the other side of the gauze panel, a pair of dashing greys were drawing to the kerb a small landau, in which, nestling among furs, there swayed the figure of a young girl. A moment the lawyer studied the pretty face, with its large dark orbs, its rippling, childish curls on brow and temples, and its clearly-cut, aristocratic features. Then he occupied himself once more with his correspondence.

He was soon interrupted by a tap at the door beyond which the deaf clerk kept his invariable guard. Absent mindedly, Mr. Pontifex called to him to enter. The stooping form shuffled across the floor in its shabby garments and laid a card on the writing-table. The solicitor scanned it. It read:

MISS MURIEL WAKEFORD.

"Show her in," commanded Mr. Pontifex, still absorbed in his letters.

The clerk retreated with his usual clumsy quietness. When he reappeared it was to announce the caller. The lawyer looked up, throwing off his preoccupation. To his surprise he beheld the very figure that had so recently been visible through his office window.

Miss Muriel Wakeford was as nervous as she was handsome, and as handsome as she was well-dressed. For an instant she gazed anxiously at the solicitor. After a searching inspection of his acute countenance, she inquired falteringly:

"Mr. Pontifex, I believe?"

"The same," said Mr. Pontifex, smiling at the simple caution of his charming client; "what can I have the pleasure——?" He paused suggestively.

The visitor pushed her fur cloak from her young shoulders.

"Please!" she answered eagerly, "I want you to help me out of the most awful trouble I was ever in. They say you are very clever and kind, and that you never, never let things get into the papers."

"I shall hope to sustain my reputation in your service, Miss Wakeford," replied the solicitor; "but may I not learn what I am to keep out of the papers?"

Muriel Wakeford coloured up to her brown lashes.

"I—I am engaged," she stammered, "or, at least, I was—oh, dear, how am I going to start! Mr. Pontifex, I'm to be married in a month, and what I shall do if you don't help me, I can't imagine."

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Mr. Pontifex smiled again, in spite of himself.

"Hadn't you better begin at the beginning?" he observed. "I think I might grasp the case more easily in that fashion."

"Forgive me!" begged his pretty client. "You see, it's this way. I'm in love with Mr. Allan Temple; we have known one another since we were boy and girl. But we didn't realise that we cared for each other till about six months ago, when Albert—he is Allan's twin brother—began to show me a lot of attention. Then our eyes were opened, and Allan and I knew that we—we loved one another, and that we always had done. So

"Wait until I return," Pontifex instructed, and they saw him vanish into the night.

we engaged ourselves, just before I went to Nice with Aunt Margery."

Mr. Pontifex nodded gravely—to indicate that he had appreciated these momentous details.

"Well," pursued Miss Wakeford, "Allan and I wrote regularly, and at last there came a dreadful piece of news. Albert had taken my engagement with Allan so much to heart, they said, that it had turned his brain. They had been obliged to shut him up, with a doctor to take charge of him, in one of the garrets of the house in Regent's Park—the Temples live in Regent's Park when they are in town. Allan is exactly half-an-hour older than Albert, so he inherited all his uncle's fortune. But he has always given Albert a good allowance, and I thought it just like him when he wrote me that he was having a resident specialist and doing everything that was possible for the poor fellow."

Mr. Pontifex bent his bushy brows—he was listening shrewdly to Muriel Wakeford's disjointed story.

"I came back from Nice," continued Muriel, hesitatingly; "and—and Allan and I were often together, as we had been before. Yet I felt as if we had drifted miles apart in the few weeks we had been separated, and I even caught myself wondering how I could ever have imagined myself in love with him. Finally, I tried to break off the engagement, but he was too determined for me, and Aunt Margery began to arrange for the — the wedding. That frightened me, for I had made up my mind that, whether I ever had loved Allan or not, I didn't love him now."

Muriel Wakeford leant across the writing-table by which she was seated.

"Yesterday," she said, "the truth flashed upon me, and I understood why my love for Allan seemed dead. Allan Temple isn't Allan at all, but Albert."

Mr. Pontifex had commenced to twist his sapphire ring—an infallible sign that he was deeply interested. His client proceeded, encouraged by the lawyer's calm reception of this astounding statement.

"Allan and Albert," she added, "were so alike from childhood that when they became older Allan wore a moustache and Albert didn't, in order that people might distinguish them. For years that has been the only striking difference between them. And now, absurd as it may sound, Mr. Pontifex, I am positive that the man who calls himself Allan Temple, whom I am supposed to love, and whom I am actually about to marry, is, in reality, Albert Temple, whom I always feared, perhaps almost hated. He has grown a moustache such as Allan wore, and the disguise is sufficient for everyone in the world but me. And, if I had not loved Allan, I, too, should have been deceived."

"In that case," demanded the solicitor coolly," who is the unfortunate gentleman that is asserted to be mad?"

Muriel shuddered.

"It—it must be my poor darling," she murmured; "that is, if anybody is mad. This is what I want you to find out for me, Mr. Pontifex. If the person who is believed to be Albert is Allan all the time, then I am certain that he isn't the least bit mad, but that Albert has only shut him up in order to take his place and try to marry me; and, if he is a prisoner in that wretched house, Mr. Pontifex, he must be set free, whatever it costs. I can pay; my money is my own now—I was twenty-one last birthday."

Muriel Wakeford looked very lovely as she made this spirited speech; had not Mr. Pontifex been lost in a reverie, he would doubtless have admired her extremely. But he was engrossed in his sapphire ring, which he had been twisting industriously for fully five minutes. It stopped merely that Mr. Pontifex might reach to a sheet of scribbling-paper.

"May I ask for the address of the Temples' house in

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Regent's Park," he observed, picking up his favourite pen-holder of gold and cornelian.

"Number twelve, Romanoff Avenue," replied his client, impressed, as were all who had similar experience of Hugo Pontifex, by his quiet directness.

"And your own address?" queried the lawyer. Miss Wakeford repeated it—it was that of a mansion in the dull but wealthy locality of Portman Square.

"Thank you," concluded Mr. Pontifex, touching the bell at his elbow; "as soon as I have anything to report, you shall hear from me. Meanwhile, if I may be pardoned a word of advice, Miss Wakeford, keep your suspicions to yourself. Good morning!"

As the door closed behind the graceful young figure, Mr. Pontifex began to slip off his frock-coat. In its stead he donned a loose jacket and the same unfashionable overcoat that he had chosen from his professional wardrobe for that expedition into Soho, which proved of such importance to the Bantry peerage. A flat-topped felt hat dealt a final blow to his legal appearance.

Mr. Pontifex hung up his frock-coat and glossy "silk" in the capacious corner-cupboard, locked away the rings that ordinarily glittered upon his white hands, and took a heavy umbrella. Thus equipped, he passed out through his private door, and chartered a hansom to convey him in the direction of Regent's Park.

Half-an-hour later he was surveying Number Twelve, Romanoff Avenue, having dismissed his cab at a hundred yards distance, and approached his goal on foot.

Number Twelve was a huge, semi-detached villa of red-brick—four stories and a basement, with ample garden. The loftiest floor had, in the middle, an ornamental dormer window, with a pointed roof. This window was spanned, from sill to lintel, with stout horizontal bars. Mr. Pontifex noted this with satisfaction; those bars lent to Miss Wakeford's extravagant statement a kind of support. For the rest, Number Twelve, though conventional, was grim and frowning, especially on an autumn day. Its neighbour, Number Ten, was equally grim and frowning, but much less orderly, being, in fact, to let. Otherwise it was an exact copy of the house with the barred window. Mr. Pontifex read the name of the agent, which was displayed on a discoloured board in the garden, and strolled out of Romanoff Avenue.

When he re-entered that quarter of the Regent's Park district, it was to ascend the steps of Number Ten, and procure admission with a latch-key. He had rented the house—much to the astonishment of the agent—without a preliminary visit to the interior, had paid a quarter in advance, and been yielded possession forthwith. Mr. Pontifex was essentially a man of rapid methods.

The solicitor mounted the dusty staircase that led from the hall to the upper regions. He climbed leisurely to the garret floor, and gained the room with the dormer window.

Muriel looked, and a low cry broke from her lips.

Unlike the corresponding one in Number Twelve it was not barred, but the casement was set flush with the wall, leaving no ledge or parapet to connect the two villas.

Mr. Pontifex explored the other apartments on the same floor. They were a couple of bare and shallow rooms, illuminated by skylights in the almost level roof.

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The lawyer raised the larger of these and swung himself through. He could move easily on the tiles, and attained in a few strides the brick slip that separated the houses.

From where he stood he could see the skylights of Number Twelve. They were both barred by iron rods, screwed down on the outside of the frames.

The solicitor had learnt all that was immediately necessary; he dropped agilely through the skylight by which he had come, brushed the dust from his garments; and went down again into Romanoff Avenue.

The evening was beginning to close in, and he had had no lunch. He found a restaurant, ordered a steak, and abandoned himself to reflection. His meal eaten, he sallied forth, made several small purchases, got into a cab, had himself driven to Portman Square, and sent in his card to Muriel Wakeford.

He had been shown into the library, a splendid, book-lined place, that suggested, by its rare paintings and rich curios, the extent of the fortune his pretty client had fallen heir to. She joined him at once—an anxious little figure in a trailing tea-gown.

"You have been quick," she said; "oh! I do hope it is good news—is it?"

"That depends," decided Mr. Pontifex; "have you a maid you can trust implicitly?"

"Y-yes," replied Muriel Wakeford, her eyes shining with instant excitement.

"That is lucky," answered the solicitor; "then may I ask you to change that charming dress for a plain walking costume, and tell your maid—the one you can trust—to prepare to accompany you. It would be as well for your footman to summon a four-wheeler—we shall need it. With your permission I will wait."

Muriel Wakeford looked at the cool, masterful face of the lawyer, and drew a sharp breath. But Mr. Pontifex said nothing more, and she hurried away to do his bidding. It was not long before a four-wheeled cab left Portman Square. Inside were Mr. Pontifex, Miss Muriel Wakeford, and a puzzled maid-servant. In silence they were carried to the northern fringe of Regent's Park. Here the solicitor checked the driver, paid the fare, and escorted his companions into the sombre and winding roadways that surround Romanoff Avenue.

Muriel Wakeford started as he led them to the gloomy portal of the house adjoining Number Twelve. Yet she ventured no remark until they had entered, and Mr. Pontifex, having produced a tiny dark lantern, was busily putting a match to the wick.

"Am I—are you going to let me see him?" she murmured quiveringly.

"I trust so," responded the lawyer; "you seem to be the only person who can distinguish between the brothers. Naturally, I do not want to make any mistake. But all this is in the nature of an experiment."

Carefully veiling the lantern, that it might not be seen from the street, he pioneered them up the staircases towards the garret. The yellow rays flung mysterious shadows about them as they ascended. Under the skylight by which Mr. Pontifex had investigated the roofs of the red villas, he paused to give the lantern to the maid, and once more swung himself up.

"Wait until I return," he instructed, and they saw him vanish into the night.

Surmounting the brick slip between the tiles of Number Ten and Number Twelve, the lawyer approached the skylights of the latter. One was illuminated—the radiance pierced the darkness with a gilded beam. Mr. Pontifex peered in. In an armchair below there sat a young man, reading. From somewhere in the chamber a light fell full on his countenance. He was melancholy, but handsome, and wore a well-shaped black moustache.

He rose to go, but found himself seized in a grip of steel.

The solicitor retraced his steps to the skylight of Number Ten.

"Help your mistress up," he told the maid. The girl obeyed, and Mr. Pontifex, with a steady contraction of his powerful muscles, was able to draw Muriel Wakeford through the opening. She was very quiet and determined, yet trembled nevertheless.

"Stay where you are," the lawyer ordered her maid, and himself steered his client's course across the roofs. When they were near the illuminated window of Number Twelve, Mr. Pontifex motioned to her to look in. Muriel did so and a low cry broke from her lips.

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"It is Allan," she cried: "oh, my darling, how could they say you were mad?"

The sound of her voice penetrated the glass and Allan Temple glanced up. For an instant he seemed dazed by the sight of those two watchful faces overhead. But a gleam of intelligence and hope came into his bewildered expression—and he kissed his hand, presumably, to Muriel Wakeford herself.

Mr. Pontifex, now thoroughly convinced of the accuracy of his client's story, extracted from his breast-pocket a strong screw-driver and commenced to remove the bars of the skylight. Allan Temple waited impatiently till the last one was unfastened, and then pushed open the hinged window.

"Quick!" he panted. "Pull me up—it is nearly time for Albert's daily visit. There is not a moment to be lost."

Muriel would have clasped her lover's hands to execute his wishes, but Mr. Pontifex thrust him back.

"Go slowly!" he said. "Mr. Temple, I am a lawyer, and acting in your interests. Instead of escaping, permit Miss Wakeford and I to share your captivity. I suspect that I am to be saved a great deal of trouble."

To Allan Temple's amazement, he slid through the skylight and assisted his young client to descend by means of a table and a chair. This done, he shut the window and restored the furniture to its former position, too diplomatic to observe that, while he was so engaged, the lovers had indulged in a passionate embrace.

"You say," remarked the solicitor, lowering his tones, "that you are expecting a visit from your brother. Do not waste time in explanations—we have guessed all. Decoy your brother, when he arrives, into discussing his plot, offer to give up your property, your name, and your betrothed, if he will only allow you to go abroad. Let him think your spirit broken—it is necessary for my purpose that he be thrown entirely off his guard."

The rattle of a key in the lock struck on their ears—it was that of the door at the summit of the garret stairs. Mr. Pontifex darted into the furthest of the rooms, taking Muriel Wakeford with him. They were scarcely concealed, when a step was heard in the middle apartment, and a man in evening dress appeared. Save for his costume, he was the living image of Allan Temple. For protection against the pretended lunatic, he bore, dangling from his wrist, a ponderous life-protector.

"Hullo," said the visitor, sitting down; "how are you to-night? Docter Pat tells me you're getting positively reasonable. By Jove, I believe he'll cure you one of these days—the clever little scoundrel!"

And Albert Temple laughed heartily.

"Oh, I'm cured right enough now," sighed Allan, taking the cue given him by Mr. Pontifex; "it's no use trying to fight you with this terrible likeness playing into your hands. All I ask is that you will let me go abroad. I can't live and die shut up here."

"Ah!" retorted his brother, cheerfully; "I thought you'd appreciate the situation sooner or later. You're right, Allan, my boy, I am one too many for you, with Doctor Pat to swear—at a price—that you're as mad as a hatter, and Murie Wakeford getting ready to marry me, as the real Allan Temple, in a month."

Allan groaned theatrically, but held his tongue. He had no desire to check the revelations which were being made before the hidden witnesses.

"I won't be hard on you," pursued his brother tolerantly; "a week after I'm married you shall be shipped off to Canada, with five hundred pounds in your pouch and two hundred a year as long as you're good. For the present, you're safer up here, though I'm glad you've decided to be sensible. Ta-ta!"

He rose to go, but found himself seized in a grip of steel. Mr. Pontifex had caught him round the neck from behind, and, holding him in a strangling clutch, was issuing low commands with military brevity and precision. In the twinkling of an eye Albert Temple was gagged, deprived of his life-protector, and bound in a chair.

From a natty case the lawyer fished out his pair of pocket-scissors, and dexterously snipped off the moustache of the writhing Albert—that moustache by whose aid he had been able to masquerade as Muriel Wakeford's betrothed. Then, carrying him into Allan's bedroom, the lawyer and the pretended lunatic stripped the plotter of his evening attire. This Allan substituted for his own lounge-suit, the latter being forced upon the struggling limbs of Albert Temple. The transformation completed, Albert was unbound, relieved of his gag, and deposited on the bed. Mr. Pontifex, putting away his scissors, delivered a pithy explanation.

"My dear sir," he said, "you are now Albert Temple again, and, thanks to your own machinations, that person is supposed to be as mad as a hatter. Ultimately, no doubt, we shall allow you to be cured, and sent abroad to Canada. But, for the present, you are safer up here. Your brother will be too busy with his approaching marriage to be responsible for you."

He drew up the table, lifted a chair on it, and aided Muriel Wakeford to mount to the open skylight, before Albert Temple's incredulous gaze. The lawyer followed her, after seeing the other twin-brother safely out of the garret.

"If Mr. Allan Temple chooses to call at Portman Square, to-night," he remarked, just before the door at the top of the stairs was closed by the man he had so cleverly rescued, "Miss Wakeford will probably be at home. As for myself, I will only say *au revoir*."

He replaced the furniture once more in its customary position, and, keeping a vigilant watch on the sullen Albert, swung himself up again to the roof. Having screwed down the bars with deliberate skill, he led his pretty client back to her wondering maid and the open skylight of Number Ten. In his pocket—as a memento—he carried the life-protector.

* * * * *

Mr. Pontifex's prophecy proved true. For a month Albert Temple was held under lock and key. Not until the Temple-Wakeford marriage was a week old did he descend from the floor with the barred windows. And then it was upon the certificate of the rascally little Irish doctor, with whom he had plotted to defraud his brother of wife and fortune. But "Doctor Pat"—being generously treated by Mr. Pontifex—kept his own counsel, and gravely congratulated his "patient" on a "surprising recovery."

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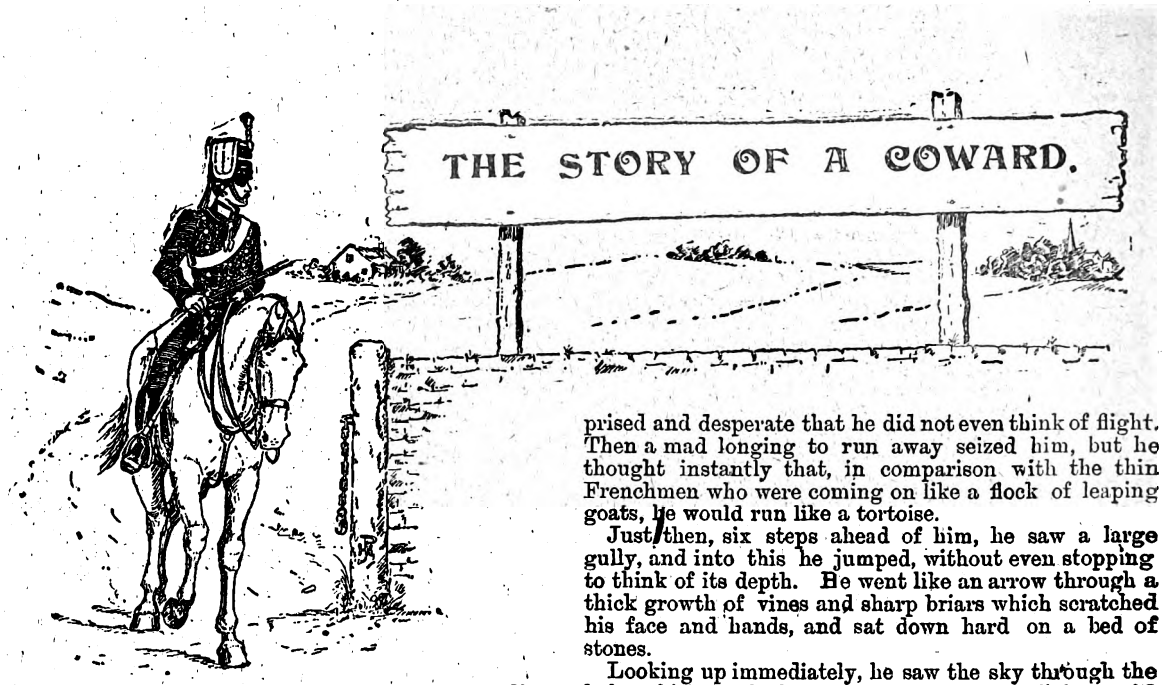

EVER since he entered France with the invading German army, Walter Schnaffs had considered himself the unhappiest of men. He was stout, walked with difficulty, puffed a good deal, and suffered much from his feet, which were flat and very fat. He was, besides, of a peaceful and kind disposition, not at all heroic or warlike, father of four children, whom he adored, and husband of a fair young wife, whose kisses and caresses and thoughtful care he missed sadly every day. He liked to go to bed early and get up late, to eat good things at his ease, and to drink beer. He believed, moreover, that everything worth having ended with life, and he cherished in his heart a deep hatred, which was both instinctive and rational, for cannon, rifles, revolvers, and swords, and, above all, for bayonets, for he felt that he was not able to wield that weapon quickly enough to defend his large body.

And when at nightfall he went to bed on the ground, rolled up in his cloak beside his snoring comrades, he thought for a long time of those he had left behind, and of the dangers which surrounded his path. If he should be killed, what would become of his little ones? Who would feed them and bring them up?

And sometimes Walter Schnaffs wept. At the beginning of each battle his legs felt so weak that he would have fallen if he had not feared that the whole army would pass over his body. The whistling of the balls made his hair stand on end. And so for months he lived in a state of fear and anguish.

The main body of the troops was advancing towards Normandy, and one day he was sent to reconnoitre with a small detachment which was simply to explore a part of the neigbbourhood and then fall back again. Everything seemed quiet in that district, and nothing indicated an organised resistance, but just as the Prussians were calmly entering a little valley, crossed occasionally by deep gullies, a brisk firing brought them to a standstill, cutting down a score of their number, and a body of sharpshooters, rushing out from a handful of trees, charged them with bayonets fixed.

Walter Schnaffs at first remained motionless, so surprised and desperate that he did not even think of flight. Then a mad longing to run away seized him, but he thought instantly that, in comparison with the thin Frenchmen who were coming on like a flock of leaping goats, he would run like a tortoise.

Just then, six steps ahead of him, he saw a large gully, and into this he jumped, without even stopping to think of its depth. He went like an arrow through a thick growth of vines and sharp briars which scratched his face and hands, and sat down hard on a bed of stones.

Looking up immediately, he saw the sky through the hole which he had made. That tell-tale hole would betray him, and he crawled along on his hands and feet, at the bottom of the ditch, under the roof made by the interlacing branches, going as fast as he could away from the fighting. After a while he stopped and sat down again, squatting like a hare in the tall, dry grass.

For some time he still heard the shots, cries, and moans. Then the sounds of the struggle grew fainter and ceased. All was calm and quiet again. Suddenly something stirred close by him and gave him a frightful start. It was a little bird which had perched on a branch, and rustled the dead leaves.

For nearly an hour Walter Schnaffs' heart beat with great bounds. The night was coming on, filling the gully with shadows, and the soldier began to reflect. What would become of him? What should he do? Must he begin again that horrible life of anguish, terror, fatigue, and suffering which he had led since the beginning of the war? No, he no longer had the courage and the energy necessary to bear the marches and face the incessant dangers.

But what could he do? He could not stay in this ditch and conceal himself until the war was over. No, indeed! If he had not been obliged to eat, that prospect would not have disturbed him; but he *was* obliged to eat—to eat every day.

Suddenly he thought, "If I were only a prisoner!" and he was filled with a sudden, violent longing to become a prisoner. A prisoner! He would be saved, fed, lodged, sheltered from shots and sabres, without any further apprehension, in a comfortable, well-guarded prison? What a glorious dream! And he immediately decided to make himself a prisoner. He got up, resolved to carry out his plan without a moment's delay.

But suddenly he stopped motionless, assailed by disagreeable thoughts and new terrors. Where was he to go to make himself a prisoner? In which direction, and how? And frightful pictures of death rushed into his mind. He would run great risks in venturing alone about the country in his spiked helmet. What *if* he

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should meet some peasants? As soon as they saw a wandering, defenceless Prussian, they would murder him with their pitchforks, their pickaxes, their scythes, their shovels! They would reduce him to a pulp in their rage at their country's defeat. What if he should meet sharpshooters? They would shoot him as soon as they saw him to amuse themselves, to pass away the time, for the fun of the thing.

And he fancied himself already standing against the wall, opposite to a dozen gun-barrels, whose little, black, round holes seemed to be looking at him. And if he should meet the French army itself! The vanguard would take him for a scout, for some bold and crafty soldier reconnoitering alone, and they would shoot him down. And he heard already the irregular firing of the soldiers, hidden in a thicket, while he, standing in the middle of the field, sank down, riddled like a sieve, by the balls which he could feel entering his flesh.

He sat down again in desperation. His situation seemed hopeless to him. Night had by this time quite settled down—dumb, black night. He did not move, but trembled at every slight and unknown sound which was heard in the darkness. A rabbit stealing through the leaves nearly put him to flight. The hooting of the owls tore his soul with sudden fears, as painful as wounds. He strained his large eyes to try to pierce the gloom, and every moment he thought he heard a footstep near him.

Into this he jumped.

After endless hours of torture he saw the sky growing light through his roof underbrush. At that a great relief filled him. His muscles relaxed, and he stretched himself with a lightened heart. His eyes closed, and he slept.

When he awoke, the sun seemed to be almost overhead; it must be noon. No noise broke the dull quiet of the fields, and Walter Schnaffs discovered that he was seized with sharp hunger. He rose, walked a few steps, found that his legs were weak, and sat down again to think. For two or three hours he weighed the pros and cons, changing his mind every minute hesitating, unhappy, and distracted by the most conflicting emotions.

One idea seemed to him sufficiently practical: It was to watch until some unarmed villager should pass by, one who had no dangerous farming tools with him, and then to run out and put himself in his hands, making him understand that he surrendered himself. Then he took off his helmet, the spike of which was likely to betray him, and thrust his head out of his hole with infinite precaution. Not a soul was to be seen. Yonder, at the right, the smoke rose towards the sky from the roofs of a little village—smoke from the kitchen fires. At the left he saw, at the end of an avenue of trees, a large house. He waited thus until evening, suffering frightfully, seeing nothing but flocks of crows. And once more night fell around him. He stretched himself at the bottom of his retreat, and slept an uneasy sleep, haunted by nightmares, the sleep of a famished man.

Dawn broke again over his head. Once more he took up his post of observation. But the country was as deserted as it had been the night before, and a new fear possessed him—the fear of dying of hunger! He saw himself stretched at the bottom of his hole, flat on his back, with eyes closed.

This thought nearly maddened him, for he would be overcome with weakness and unable to walk. And he was quite determined to hurry to the village, to dare all, to brave all, when he saw three peasants coming towards the fields with their pitchforks on their shoulders, and he drew back into his hiding-place.

But, as soon as the evening darkened the plain, he crawled slowly out of the ditch, and started off towards the large house, preferring to go there rather than to the village, which seemed as formidable to him as a den of tigers. The lower windows were lighted up. One of them was open, and a strong odour of roast meat came from it, an odour which, rushing through the nostrils of Walter Schnaffs, made him impatient, made him pant for breath, drew him irresistibly forward, and filled his heart with desperate courage.

Suddenly, without stopping to think, he appeared with his helmet on in the open window. Eight servants were seated at dinner round a large table. All at once a nurse stopped, open-mouthed, dropping her glass, and stared fixedly ahead of her. All eyes followed hers.

They saw the enemy! Heavens! The Prussians were attacking the house!

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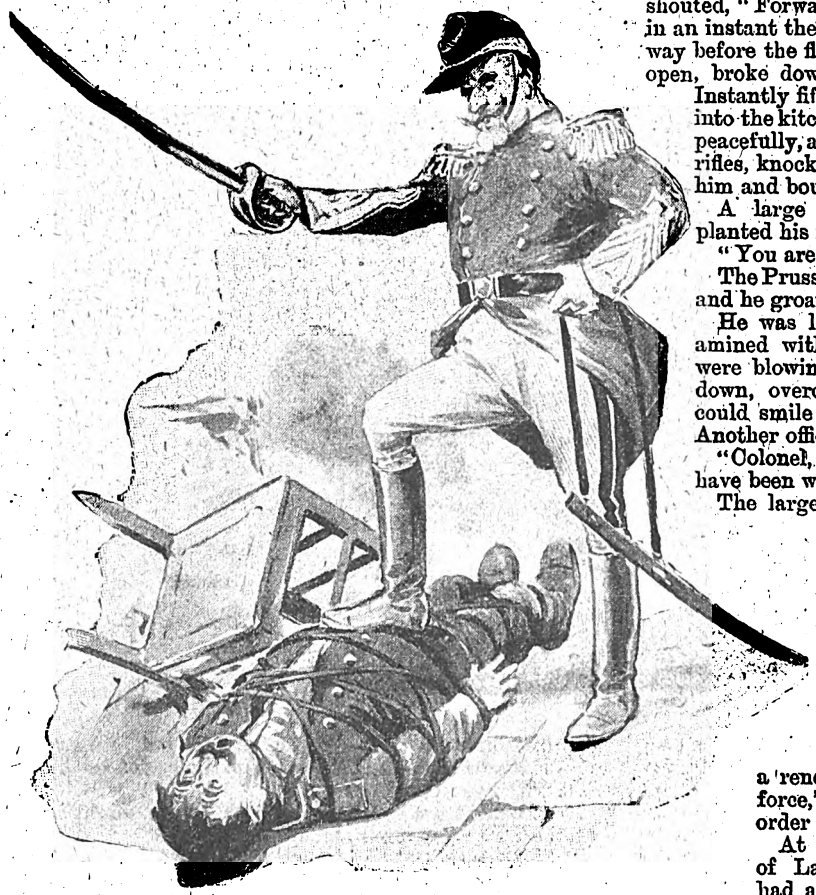
There was at once a cry, composed of eight screams uttered together by different voices, a cry of frightful terror, then a confused rising, and a stampede to the door at the back of the room. Chairs were knocked down, the men upset the women and rushed over them, and in two seconds the room was empty, abandoned, with the table covered with food standing before the astonished Walter Schnaffs, who was still at the window.

After an instant of hesitation he climbed in and went towards the table. His great hunger made him as weak as a man in a fever, but he was still paralyzed by terror. He listened.



"You are my prisoner! Surrender!"

The whole house was in a tumult; doors were slamming, and rapid footsteps were heard overhead. The uneasy Prussian listened to these noises, and heard dull sounds as if bodies were falling into the soft earth at the foot of the walls, human beings who had leapt from the storey above. Then all movement, all the commotion, stopped, and the great house became as silent as a tomb.

Schnaffs seated himself before a full plate and began to eat. He ate in large mouthfuls, as if he were afraid of being interrupted too soon, before he had had enough. He emptied all the plates, all the dishes, all the bottles; then, satisfied with eating and drinking, stupefied, flushed, his mind uneasy and his tongue thick, he unbuttoned his uniform to breathe more easily, incapable of taking a step. His eyes closed, his thoughts grew confused, he leant his heavy head on his arms folded on the table, and soon lost all idea of persons and things.

The quiet house raised its great black silhouette against the sky. Two windows only on the ground-floor were lighted. Suddenly a voice of thunder shouted, "Forward! To the assault, comrades!" And in an instant the doors, the shutters, the windows gave way before the flood of men who dashed forward, burst open, broke down everything, and invaded the house.

Instantly fifty soldiers, armed to the teeth, rushed into the kitchen where Walter Schnaffs was sleeping peacefully, and placed against his body fifty loaded rifles, knocked him down, rolled him over, seized him and bound him from head to foot.

A large soldier, much bedecked with gold, planted his foot on his stomach, crying out:

"You are my prisoner! Surrender!"

The Prussian heard only the one word "prisoner," and he groaned, "Ya, ya, ya!"

He was lifted up, bound to a chair, and examined with lively curiosity by his captors, who were blowing like whales. Several of them sat down, overcome by emotion and fatigue. He could smile now, sure of being a prisoner at last. Another officer came in and announced:

"Colonel, the enemy has fled; several seem to have been wounded. We are masters of the place."

The large officer wiped his forehead and cried "Victory!" and he wrote in a little memorandum-book which he took out of his pocket:

"After a desperate struggle the Prussians were put to flight, carrying with them their dead and wounded, estimated at fifty. Several of them remain in our possession."

"What orders shall I give?" said the young officer.

"We are going to fall back to avoid a renewed attack with artillery and superior force," answered the colonel, and he gave the order to retire.

At daybreak they reached the prefecture of La Roche-Oysel, whose National Guard had accomplished this feat of arms. The anxious and much-excited townspeople were expecting them. When the prisoner's helmet was seen loud outcries were raised. The women held up their hands, the old ones wept, and an old man threw his crutch at the Prussian, and wounded one of his guards on the nose. The colonel shouted, "Keep the prisoner safe!"

They came at last to the Town Hall. The prison was opened, and Walter Schnaffs, freed from his bonds, was put in it. Two hundred armed men mounted guard round the building. Then, in spite of the symptoms of indigestion which tormented him, the Prussian, wild with joy, began to dance madly about, waving his arms and legs, and laughing crazily, until he fell in a heap, quite exhausted.

He was a prisoner. Saved!

Colonel Rotier, cloth merchant, who managed the affair at the head of the National Guard of La Roche-Oysel, was decorated.

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THE LION'S WARS

The Two Great Sikh Wars of 1844-1847, 1848-1851.

SOME illusions die hard. On the continent the belief exists to this day that our conquest of India was achieved by marching regiments of Indian soldiers, commanded by British officers, against any native Prince who had, unfortunately for himself, incurred our displeasure, our procedure being to defeat his troops, seize his person, grant him a pension, and annex his dominions.

By this time it must be clear to the reader, that so far from this being the case the wars we have waged with India were forced on us by the ceaseless efforts of the feudatory Princes, whose states we guaranteed against invasion, to drive us out of India.

Once engulfed in a policy of conquest we had to fight our way steadfastly and courageously, foot by foot, till the entire Peninsula acknowledged our sway.

Long before the Sikhs war broke out, our Indian statesmen saw that peace would never be assured till the frontier tribes of the west, and north-west, had been brought under the wing of our motley Empire.

So no sooner had we rescued the inhabitants of Scinde from the grip of the savage Beluchis than we turned our attention to the Punjaub, inhabited by the warlike Sikhs.

We first hear of the Sikhs in the XVI. century. A brave and robust race had migrated to the Punjaub and had become one of the most powerful nations on the frontier of India.

The French, ever our enemies, forseeing that the warlike temperament of the people would sooner or later bring us into conflict with them, secretly introduced into the country, shortly after their defeat at Waterloo, a number of officers who trained the Sikh troops to such a pitch of efficiency, that it was thought by competent judges that they would prove more than a match for the British.

During the life of Runjeet Singh the Lion of the Punjaub (a man of great talent although of poor education) the chieftains had been kept in rigid subjection. A man of indomi able will, he consolidated a number of small estates into one vast kingdom, ruling it with a rod of iron. But the breath was no sooner out of his body than the country fell into a state of anarchy. His eldest son was slain in a brawl, his wife and infant child fled, whilst the army which for years had been pining for conflict, demanded to be led against the British.

The authorities at Calcutta, knowing that the long smouldering hatred of the Sikhs for us would burst into flame, had on the death of Runjeet Singh quietly massed 30,000 men and ninety guns to a camp lying between Meerut and Loodiana under the command of General Sir H. Gough.

One of the first acts of the Sikh army was to insist that General Pollock and his "Army of Retribution," which was to punish the Afghans, and bring away the beleaguered garrisons, should be refused a passage through the Punjaub.

This being declined they insisted on being allowed to raid the convoys and cut the communication. As Sheer Singh, the successor of Runjeet Singh, refused to

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sanction these proceedings, Ajeet Singh, his brother-in-law, with the connivance of the soldiery, murdered him.

Ajeet then, in order to render his rule supreme, proceeded to murder the rest of the royal family.

Unfortunately for his plans two escaped—Djehan Singh and Heerah Singh.

These worthies, after capturing the murderer, handed him to the mob who literally tore him in pieces. After this, murd r and debauchery of every kind marched hand in hand through the Punjaub.

When the pleasures of murdering each other began to pall, the Sikh chiefs began to mass their forces in the neighbourhood of Lahore, their capital.

The mother of Maharajan Dhuleep Singh (a mere boy who now succeeded to the throne), fearing for her own and her son's life, then circulated a report that the British Army, which had been increased to 40,000 men, was intended for the conquest of the Punjaub, besides throwing out hints as to the value of the treasures stored in Agra, Delhi, and Benares. Their cupidity thus roused, the Sikhs at once crossed the Sutlej. The two chiefs who led the Sikhs might easily have crushed the small force stationed on the river bank under Sir John Littler, but a timely bribe from one of the East India Company's secret agents induced them to grant a truce of one week to enable us to retire. This gave time for Sir H. Gough, by means of a forced march of 150 miles in six days under a burning sun, to appear on the scene.

Bitterly repenting of their folly, Lah Singh and Tib Singh attempted to bar Gough's passage with a force of 10,000 infantry and 4,000 cavalry. In the hand to hand struggle which followed the British saw that at last they had met foemen worthy of their steel. After a sanguinary engagement lasting six hours they succeeded in driving the enemy back, but their losses were dreadfully heavy considering the smallness of the attacking force. In this skirmish, as it was called, our casualties were 215 killed, and 607 wounded. A few days later the two British forces effected a junction at Ferozeshuhur.

Having rested his troops, Sir H. Gough, undismayed by the numerical superiority of the foe, which was so great that their front exceeded a mile in extent, resolved to attack. For some reason or other, however, the assault was delayed till the day was far spent, and, to still further cloud the issue, Gough hurled his men at the enemy's position without stopping to think what the enemy would do.

Gough was one of those generals which have always been plentiful in the British Army. Of strategy he had not the slightest notion. His plan was to point to the enemy, shout in a loud voice: "there they are, my lads, and now let us give it them hot," and then placing himself at their head, rush headlong to the attack.

Gough took charge of the right wing, Littler the left, whilst the Governor-General, Sir H. Hardinge, a soldier of rare ability, modestly contented himself with the centre. Gough would not hear of any other plan: his orders to Littler were, "March straight on till you get within a hundred yards and then charge and capture their guns."

Littler did draw attention to the strength of the Sikh position, but Gough rode impatiently off. Littler carried out his instructions. In the teeth of a most tremendous fire his men fought their way right up to the very mouth of the guns. There the storm of bullets worked such deadly havoc that after holding their ground for two hours the ranks became so thinned that they were compelled to retreat.

The attack of General Gough was even more vigorously conducted than that of the left, but the Sikh gunners who had been splendidly trained by the French, fought well. Their fire injured many of our guns, decimated squadrons of horse, whilst their heavy shot tore deep lanes in the ranks of our infantry.

Matters presently began to look so hopeless that Gough ordered a retreat. But his men were in no mood to listen. Heedless of the growing darkness they refused to return and marched on, getting so hopelessly entangled that officers found themselves heading companies of which they knew nothing. All discipline vanished, but there was something which took its place, a fierce determination on the part of our men to bivouac in the enemy's camp.

How they lived through the deadly concentrated fire poured on them during the last hundred yards by their well trained adversaries is not to be explained. But they somehow contrived to get inside the Sikh trenches, and once there refused to budge. This demonstrates that the science of teaching war stops short at the bayonet. The bayonet got them in and the bayonet kept them there. Having cleared all the enemy out, the troops, now thoroughly exhausted, went to sleep beside the dead bodies of their victims although their position was one of great danger, the main body of the Sikhs being only a short distance off.

At another part of the field the position was equally critical. Sir Harry Smith, who subsequently defeated the Boers at the battle of Boomplats in the Orange Free State, by dint of severe fighting had actually fought his way into the heart of the Sikh position. Followed by a body of our wonderful infantry, Sir Harry even obtained possession of the village of Ferozeshuhur and would have made good his position had supports been sent up. These not being forthcoming, this same matchless infantry seeing they were surrounded, cut their way out, but retreat further than two miles they would not.

Sir Henry Hardinge was more successful. In spite of a most destructive fire, his men fought their way right up to the edge of the Sikh position, intrenched and held their ground despite all efforts to dislodge them. The night was bitterly cold, the men in all parts of the field were without food or covering, but no one murmured, for they all knew that next morning they would either have to defeat the enemy or die dishonourably on the field. During the night the Govenor-General went among the soldiers, told them that the losses had been tremendous, and offered to retreat to Ferozepur, but they all repudiated the idea with disdain. It was well they did, for in the night a serious quarrel broke out in the Sikh camp.

The soldiers having demanded their pay, which was greatly in arrears, it was declared that the military chest had been rifled. The two chiefs, Lal Singh and Tib Singh, were both accused of the theft and recriminations were fast ripening the quarrel into a fight when the British appeared.

The temper of our men was shown at the commencement of the battle. A powerful gun had been run forward over a mile to check our central advance. Although it was protected by 5,000 of the Sikh crack shots, the brave 80th made a dash for the gun and despite all the efforts of the Sikhs, carried it off.

In the meantime, Sir Henry Hardinge on the left, and Sir Hugh Gough on the right, marched on, despite

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Drawn by] **The Sikhs rode into our disorganised ranks.** *[Lawson Wood.*

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volleys of musketry, till the Sikh lines were reached. Then they made straight for Ferozeshuhur, the carrying of which—for five assaults on it were repulsed—entailed a fearful loss of life. So soon as the village was taken the two wings changed front and swept the whole of the Sikh position from end to end like a hurricane.

Still victory hung in the balance. Our men were beginning to think about dinner, when Tib Singh and 20,000 splendid Sikhs and seventy guns, came in sight. Dismayed at finding the village in our hands, and little dreaming that the troops were quite worn out, they contented themselves with a distant bombardment and retired. Had they attacked, nothing could have saved our Army from total destruction. Our losses in this battle were terrible, the number being nearly 3,000, of whom 1,721 were killed outright. We killed 2,000 Sikhs and wounded 6,000 more, besides capturing seventy-three guns.

Although we had captured seventy-three guns, the Sikhs withdrew so slowly across the Sutlej, that it soon came to be believed that the battle could hardly be called a victory for our arms. A fresh campaign was therefore undertaken in order that the honour and prestige of Britain might be thoroughly vindicated. But the time spent in collecting supplies was so great that the Sikhs, misunderstanding the cause, again at the end of January, 1846, crossed the Sutlej and advanced against the important station of Loodiana. In order to prevent the Sikhs attacking a valuable convoy from Delhi, Sir Harry Smith moved to Aliwal, and at once came into contact with the Sikh army, 15,000 strong, under Runjur Singh. Our general had only 11,000 men, but having the instincts of a true soldier he turned the enemy's position, throwing them by this manœuvre into such confusion that with the aid of the bayonet he was able to storm the village of Aliwal. This reverse so discouraged the Sikh chiefs that they opened secret negotiations for peace with Calcutta.

Our terms were that the Sikh force should be disbanded, but as the Sikh leaders were not powerful enough to effect this, the Army being omnipotent in the Punjaub, they sent an emissary to Calcutta proposing that the Sikh army should be attacked unawares and that after the battle our troops should march straight to Lahore where no resistance should be offered.

During these negotiations the Sikhs, 40,000 in number, occupied a strongly-intrenched camp on both sides of the Sutlej, connection being established by a bridge of boats near the village of Sobraon. The Sikhs having regained their old confidence were anxious to try conclusions with us, and their ardour was inflamed by an old warrior, Shen Singh, who to propitiate the god of battle declared he would offer his life as a sacrifice in the next engagement.

The desire to recommence hostilities was just as keen in the British camp. Reinforcements in addition to powerful ordnance arrived in such numbers that on the morning of the battle of Sobraon, Feb. 10th, 1846, our force had increased to 15,000 men, of whom quite 5,000 were British.

So soon as it was observed that the Sikhs had planted their artillery in a fort built in the centre it was resolved to make the attack on both flanks, break through, and if possible capture the guns. Nothing can be urged against this plan, but when it was further resolved that as the enemy's right was weak its destruction would be assured were it assailed by General Dick, who was at the head of our strongest division, a grievous blunder was committed.

It is true we might be able to crush the Sikh right, but would an attack by our weak right be able to succeed against the Sikh strong left? Doubtful. In fact it was only the courage of the British soldier which saved the day.

A fog at daybreak enabled us to approach within striking distance of the left. When it dispersed the two armies were close together.

The Sikhs, quite undismayed, met our rushes in the most heroic manner.

Our right after a most sanguinary fight managed to break through the enemy's lines, but the pressure of numbers soon so huddled them together, that they would have been annihilated had not the officers broken through the throng, and calling on their men to follow them made for the centre.

With a loud hurrah our red coats crossed a ditch, and before the gunners could realise what was taking place, had scaled some ramparts, and bayoneted every gunner in the central fort.

Victory on the left and centre would have come much sooner after the capture of the centre fort had not Shen Singh roused the fanaticism of the Sikhs to fever heat by galloping, clothed in the white robes of martyrdom, right into the middle of the British left.

In an instant 10,000 Sikh soldiers were at his heels and a fight ensued which for sheer ferocity has probably never been equalled in history.

Whilst the issue was still undecided the treacherous Tib Singh, having destroyed the centre boats of the bridge, ordered a retreat.

So few heeded the order that the betrayal of his countrymen might have been averted had the Sikhs been fighting any other soldiers but British. As it was, the stern unbending courage of our men triumphed over the fiery valour of the Sikhs.

After being driven to the river brink the Sikhs, owing to the bridge being broken, had to still fight on.

The orders being that their army was to be thoroughly dispersed the batteries were brought up and such a torrent of shot and shell poured into the defeated foe that next day over 7,000 dead bodies were counted. Their total loss is said to have exceeded 12,000. Our own too was sadly heavy, 320 being killed and 2,083 wounded.

We then crossed the Sutlej without opposition and invaded the Punjaub. On February 12th we captured the town and fortress of Kussoor, and on the 20th, reached Lahore.

By the peace which followed, the boundary of the Punjaub was pushed back from the Sutlej to the Beas and the army disbanded, save about 20,000 Sikhs to act as police.

But the peace was of short duration. In 1848 Mr. Vane Agnew and Lieutenant Anderson, our representatives, were murdered. Owing to Sir H., now Lord, Gough, not caring to move the troops in mid-winter time was given for a rebellion to be organised.

In August General Whish and 7,000 men were dispatched to recapture Mooltan, but owing to the treachery of Shen Singh, our General was compelled to intrench and await reinforcements.

This misfortune led to the rising becoming general. Lord Gough at once went to the front. Advancing with all his impetuosity, he attempted to drive Shen Singh across the river. Had he waited for his artillery he might have succeeded.

As it was the Sikh artillery on the opposite side of

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the river so effectually checked his progress that he resolved to try and effect their capture.

This was a prudent resolve, but so much time was wasted in marching up stream to find a ford, that Shen Singh was able to remove his army to the Jhelum where he fortified his position with such skill that several weeks elapsed before we were ready to attack it.

On January 14th, 1846, Gough advanced against the Sikhs, coming in touch with them at Chillianwallah. The foe had taken up, as we have said, a splendid defensive position and fortified it after the best European methods.

The dangers of a frontal attack were so evident even to General Gough, that he determined on a reconnaisance in force (a most unusual movement with him) previous to attacking. Before it could be carried out his old impetuosity reasserted itself. The insolence of the Sikh gunners so annoyed him that although it was within two hours of nightfall, he gave orders for an immediate advance.

On receiving the word our men as usual rushed headlong at the guns. But the Sikh artillery, in addition to occupying an almost unassailable position, was so numerous and so well served that long before we reached them our men began to drop by scores. Still they persevered, but when over seventy of their guns got our range the ranks thinned at such an alarming rate that the survivors, to avoid extermination, beat a hasty retreat.

The native soldiers, unused to such a sight, became panic-stricken, seeing which the Sikhs swooped down on us with inconceivable fury. The 24th were cut to pieces besides losing their colours, and the native troops driven pell-mell off the field. The handful of British still left fought with the most stubborn bravery, hurling back charge after charge of the Sikh horsemen. But as the reserves sent by Lord Gough, owing to their having lost their way in the jungle, failed to reach the little band on whose efforts the fortunes of the day depended, defeat seemed certain.

The result was trembling in the balance, another instant and it would be all over, when General Campbell, who before the battle had marched his men round the enemy's rear, appeared on the scene. Grasping the situation, the General ordered his men to get to work with the bayonet.

Baulked of their prey, the maddened Sikhs refused to retreat before the dreaded steel, pressing our men so hard that it was doubtful whether the day would have been saved, had not the cavalry who had been told off to guard the ammunition and wings, been sent into action towards the close. The 9th Lancers and the 14th Dragoons drove into the solid mass of Sikh infantry, hacking and hewing at them till even these dauntless warriors were compelled to fly.

Then disaster again threatened us. An undiscovered traitor called out as the Sikh horse galloped towards us: "Threes about." Some of our fellows obeyed and retreated, others did not. Still, the whole regiment was thus thrown into such confusion, that the Sikhs, seeing that a good opportunity was come, and burning to retrieve their losses, rode into our disorganised ranks cutting us down right and left, besides capturing five guns.

In other parts of the field we were more successful. Yet it must be confessed that, although we held the ground during the night, Chillianwallah cannot be reckoned a British victory.

We lost over 2,000 men, the Sikhs probably more. We captured twelve guns and lost five. In Britain, the battle was regarded as a defeat. Lord Gough was recalled and Sir C. Napier sent out to break the power of the Sikhs for good. But the Fates had relented. Before Napier landed Lord Gough had fought and won the battle of Guzerat, Feb. 21st, 1849, and the Punjaub was annexed.

In this last battle we thoroughly re-established our supremacy. After breaking up the Sikh army, we chased it across the country for miles.

The Sikhs now fight on our side. If Russia ever invades India she will find the Sikh soldier an awkward antagonist.

(*Next week:* **The Wars in Ashanti.**)

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A good thing . . . . .
If you can't get . . . . .
That good thing . . . . .
Supplied fast enough . . .

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SHORT STORIES THAT MAKE YOU LAUGH.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "Guilty Gold," by Headon Hill, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, March 18th. Post-cards only, please.

The Prize of One Guinea for the best Storyette has been won this week by Mr. R. A. H. Goodyear, of Tune Street, Barnsley, Yorks, for the Storyette entitled "Elucidated."

Elucidated.

THE first question the bishop put to the children was, "Can any of you bairns tell me what average is?"

This, apparently, was too easy, for hands shot up along every desk in the class-room, importuning his notice.

"I'll let you tell me, my little man," said the bishop, patting the curly head of the schoolmaster's son, who had been artfully placed in the front row.

"Please, my lord, average is what a hen lays eggs on," was the startling answer.

Sorely did this definition puzzle his lordship, and he was constrained to ask the boy for further enlightenment.

"Well, sir," explained the boy, "I don't quite understand it myself, but when people ask mother how many eggs her hens lay, she always says, 'twenty a day on an average.'"

R. A. H. G.

A Parting Shot.

IT was in an American railway car, a fierce battle raged between a male and female. He was smoking where smoking was "strictly prohibited."

She objected on principle, and because she loathed the "horrid weed."

There was no lack of ammunition and the attack threatened to last through the long journey, till the woman, ever hoping to have the last word, shrieked:

"If you were my husband I would put poison in your coffee."

"And," replied the man, "if you were my wife, I would gladly drink it."

With this cruel and victorious shot he left the car, feeling that he had won the day!

J. G. B.

Sensational.

A REPORTER for the NEWS was taken on trial.

He went hunting for items and returned in the evening with a sensational report:

"This morning I saw a sight that froze my blood with horror. A cabman driving down the street at a rapid pace nearly ran over a nurse with a baby. There would have been a most heartrending catastrophe had not the nurse with wonderful forethought left the child at home before she came out and providently stepped into a milliner's shop just before the cab passed. The cabman, too, just before the crossing, thought of something he had forgotten, and, turning round, drove back. Had it not been for this wonderful forethought of both, a doting father, a loving mother, and affectionate brothers and sisters, would have been plunged into the deepest sorrow."

The reporter will be kept on.

G. D.

She Spoilt the Scene.

THE Amateur Thespians were giving a performance of *The Lady of Lyons*, and the village institute was packed to its utmost capacity with an indulgent and none too critical audience.

All went well until the scene was reached where Claude Melnotte, masquerading as a prince, proposes to Pauline, and begins to describe his imaginary palace on the Lake of Como. He had no sooner started the well-known lines, however, when an old woman jumped up from her seat, and addressing herself to the young lady who was sustaining the title *rôle* she shouted out:

"Dunnot thee believe him, wench, for he's telling thee nowt but a pack o' lies. He's noather a prince, nor has he a palace. Aw'll tell thee what he is: he's a weaver down at Brookside factory, an' it's a rare week for him when he draws fifteen shillin'!"

Then she sat down, but it took the audience some time to stifle their merriment, and it is needless to add that the scene was entirely spoilt.

A. V.

Willing to be Knocked Down Again.

A CIVIL word is the cheapest thing in the world, and if spoken at the proper time is often a solace to a weary heart. I was abruptly turning a corner the other day when I ran against a boy who was ragged, small and freckled. Stopping, I turned to him and said:

"I beg your pardon; indeed, I am sorry."

The boy looked up in blank amazement for an instant, then, taking off about three-fourths of a cap, bowed very low, smiled until his face was beaming, and answered:

"You kin hev my parding and welcome, miss; and yer may run ag'in me and knock me clean down an' I won't say a word."

As I was passing away he turned to a comrade and said, half-apologetically:

"I never had anyone ask my parding an' it kind o' took me off my feet."

MISS S.

Breaking It Gently.

Two soft, white arms go stealing around his neck, and a fair, peach-like cheek is rubbed carelessly against his own.

Faintly whispered, "Dear papa," and "Darling old boy," and "Don't you love your sweet?" reach his startled ears as he vainly attempts to pull himself together and avoid the loving, sugar-coated attack which he well knows is coming.

"Well, daughter mine," he finally asks, "what is it? Not another new dress, surely?"

"Oh, no, papa darling."

"H-m-m, that's good. And it can't be the milliner again?"

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"No, papa, love."

"H-m-m, better still. It isn't the florist?"

"No, you dearest papa."

"H-m-m, great Scott! You don't want a trip to Italy, do you?"

"No, you lovely old dear."

"Well, what in the name of goodness do you want, my little girl?"

"Darling papa mine, I don't want anything—ah, that is—Jack wants me."

A. P.

Bill and the Ghost.

THE topic of conversation in a certain country inn one evening turned to ghosts, and, of course, the local ghost came under consideration.

Old Bill declared he did not believe in ghosts at all, The result was all the company said he dare not go through the wood at midnight.

He took the bet and the condition was, that he took a certain article and placed it against the gate on the other side of the wood.

Arming himself with a heavy stick he set forth on his hazardous journey.

In the middle of the wood a weird white object with horns appeared, and slowly moving to a narrow part of the path, prevented Bill passing. Its white body presented a ghastly contrast to the dark wood.

"Let me pass," called Bill.

No response.

"Let me pass or you will feel this stick."

No response. Thud went the stick right between the horns. The ghost fell and Bill passed on.

He deposited the article and returned.

"Did you see anything, Bill?" they all shouted in chorus.

"Yes, but I hit him between the horns and he shifted."

Two or three of the company rushed through the wood and there, groaning in a semi-conscious condition with a pair of bullock's horns fastened on his head and a sheet drawn over so that the horns appeared through the sheet, lay the man who originated the plot to frighten old Bill.

J. S.

Not Her Laddie.

A GENTLEMAN on a walk from one of the suburbs of Glasgow happened to call at a farmhouse, where he was readily supplied with a glass of milk.

He offered the lady sixpence, but she declined all payment.

"I couldn't take money for 't," she said, in her own proud way.

The gentleman expressed his acknowledgment and went on his way, but at the garden gate he detected a small boy playing.

Surely, he thought, this is the lady's son. So he put his hand in his pocket to give him the sixpence, when he heard a shrill voice:

"That's no ma laddie, sir."

Then there was a pause, and the voice afterwards resounded, this time directed to a small boy at the side door.

"Gang oot, Willie, an' speak till the nice gentleman at the gate."

G. E. G.

The Reason Why.

A SCHOOLMASTER in a village school had been in the habit of purchasing pork from parents of his pupils on the occasion of the killing of a pig.

One day a small boy marched up to the master's desk and inquired if he would like a bit of pork, as they were going to kill their pig.

The schoolmaster replied in the affirmative.

Several days elapsed, and, hearing nothing of the pork, the master called the boy up to him, and inquired the reason he had not brought it.

"Oh, please sir," the boy replied, "the pig got better."

E. R.

She Startled Him.

"Now, Mr. B——," coldly said the handsome young widow, steadfastly watching the butcher as he weighed the sirloin she had just selected, "while I am fully conscious of the honour you wish to confer upon me, I must tell you that I have no present intention of marrying again, and I am compelled to refuse the offer of your hand."

"Bu—bu—but, ma'am," stammered the astonished butcher, "I never offered you my hand, and—er——"

"Then why are you trying to weigh it on the scales with the meat, sir?"

J. R. T.

At the Inquiry Office.

"HALLOA. Is this the gas office?"

"What is it?"

"When do the entries for the next races open?"

"We don't know anything about the races, this is the gas office."

"Just so; but I thought you could tell me."

"Why what do you want to know for?"

"Oh, nothing particular, I have a gas meter which I would like to enter, that's all!"

J. E.

"The Vag of his Tail."

A GENTLEMAN was walking with his little boy at the close of the day, and in passing the cottage of a German labourer the boy's attention was attracted to the dog. It was not a King Charles, nor a black-and-tan, but a common cur. Still, the boy took a fancy to him, and wanted "pa" to buy him. Just then the owner of the dog came home from his labours, and was met by the dog with every demonstration of dog joy. The gentleman said to the owner:

"My little boy has taken a fancy to your dog, and I will buy him. What do you ask for him?"

"I can't sell dat dog," said the German.

"Look here," said the gentleman, "that is a poor dog; but, as my boy wants him, I will give you a sovereign for him."

"Yaas," said the German, "I knows he is a werry poor dog, and he ain't worth almost nottin'; but dere ish von leetle ding mit dat dog vot I can't sell—I can't sell de vag of his tail ven I comes home ad night."

P. R.

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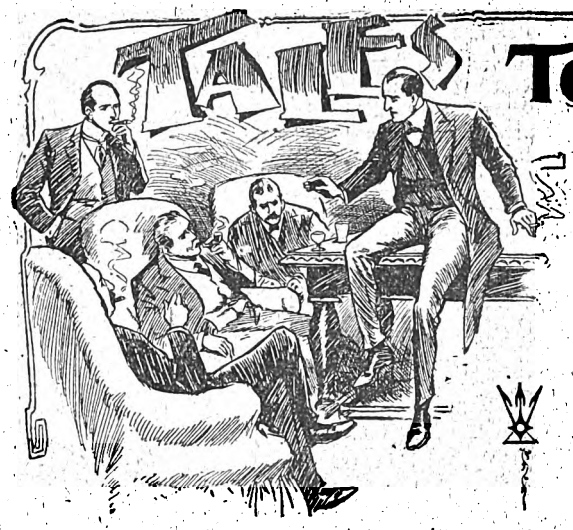

TOLD "OFF DUTY."

[You probably don't know the "Stand-Easy" Club. It isn't in the directory, and you might live next door to the place for years without knowing of its existence by that name. It isn't a conventional club; there is no subscription, and there is no register of members. It is merely a room in a quiet, orderly, and select hostelry in Westminster, where, by common consent, a number of officials of all kinds meet when "off duty." There you may find detectives from Scotland Yard, near by; firemen, commissionaires, a soldier or two, and maybe a doctor from St. Thomas' Hospital or elsewhere. A motley crowd they would be if they wore their uniforms, but at the "Stand-Easy" uniforms are a rarity, "mufti" being the unwritten rule. The result is a gathering of quiet, well-behaved, and well-dressed men. Saturday night is the time when one sees the biggest muster, for then it is the custom for one member to regale the company with a story, the story being, as a rule, an account of some incident in the teller's own career.]

Corporal Croft: Deserter.

Told by the COMMISSIONAIRE.

"WELL, gentlemen," said the one-armed sergeant of commissionaires, as, with a dexterity born of practice, he filled and lit his pipe, "seeing that you've picked on me for yarn-duty to-night, I suppose I must obey orders. But I give you fair warning not to expect anything of the thrilling sort from your humble servant.

"It's true I saw plenty of tough fighting in the Afghan campaign of '79-80 (lost my arm there, worse luck!) but, what with the war in South Africa, I fancy most of you have had more than your fill of battle-yarns lately; so, if you've no objection, I'll try and sling you a true tale of a less-exciting sort.

"This tale begins as far back as the year 1876, and ends up as recent as the day before yesterday; it won't take long in the telling, for all that."

Having said this much, by way of preface, Commissionaire-Sergeant Pollard reflectively fingered his heavy, iron-grey moustache, lay down his pipe, and proceeded:

"When I enlisted, I reckoned I was going to be a full-blown sergeant in about six months. 'Twasn't long before I found out my mistake. The stripes take a deal of earning—a lot more than some folks appear to think; and when I discovered what a lot of smart, well-conducted chaps there were who'd been soldiering for years and got only one stripe (sometimes not that) to show for it, I came to the conclusion that I'd made a precious fool of myself in joining the Army.

"However, there I was, and there I'd got to stop. 'You've got to make the best of a bad job, Tony Pollard,' thinks I to myself. 'Promotion may be slow, but it's sure, providing you behave yourself. Only behave yourself, Tony, and you'll be a sergeant-major yet—in the far-off days to come!'

"That was how I argued the matter out with myself, gentlemen, and, sure enough, I'd only a trifle over two years' service when I was given the lance-stripe. It was a step up the ladder at any rate, though there wasn't anything extra in the shape of pay hanging to the rank.

"Some months afterwards, I appeared in 'orders' as full-corporal, and about the same time, I got struck all of a heap by a young woman whom I saw one morning walking across the barrack-square.

"I soon found out that she was Carrie Sanders, daughter of old Bob Sanders, the colour-sergeant of K company.

"It appeared that since she was a twelve-year-old girl, she had been living near London with her aunt. This aunt having died, Miss Carrie had come back to live in barracks with her old dad, who was a widower.

"'Twas a case of love at first sight with me. Such a fine, pretty wench she was, with a pert little nose and chin, and a pair of brown eyes that were full o' fun and mischief.

"The gal fairly turned my head, and, after some manœuvring, I managed to strike up an acquaintance with her. She didn't give me much encouragement, nor did her father, though I tried all I knew to get on the right side of the old colour-sergeant. However, I didn't lose hope, for if on some days Carrie would scarcely look at me, on others she would chat in a nice, confidential sort of way that made me fancy she had more than a friendly regard for me.

"Of course, had I understood the sex like I do now, I'd have known that them cold, distant airs which made me so miserable for the time being, were part of the love-making game. But I was green in those days; ignorant as a baby of woman's little artfulnesses—well, there you are!

"I hadn't made much headway in winning Carrie Sanders' affections, when I suddenly learnt that I wasn't the only chap that was after her. In fact, there was a rival in the field—a dangerous rival too, from what I could gather.

"His name was Croft, and he was, like myself, a full-corporal. But whereas I belonged to H company, he was attached to K company, which was old Bob Sanders', and though Croft wasn't at all liked by the men, it was said that his colour-sergeant thought a lot of him.

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"Now, I knew Corporal James Croft pretty well. We'd been recruits at the depôt together, and a more unsociable chap you couldn't have found anywhere. He chummed with nobody, turned up his nose at the rations, and seemed to fancy that he was altogether our superior.

"Not that he had any reason to give himself airs; for he was a dismal-looking, fishy-eyed customer, and such a wooden-headed recruit that he almost drove the drill-sergeant mad. And in spite of his stand-offish ways, Croft had no manners to speak of. He found fault with the grub, but he bolted it ravenously all the same. He was the greediest man in the whole squad, and those of us who suspected Croft of being a 'gentleman-ranker' dismissed that idea when we noticed the manner in which he wolfed his rations.

I saw her wa'king across the barrack-square.

"When our squad was drafted to the battalion, I was put into H Company, and Croft into K. He wasn't a bright soldier as I've said; but he behaved himself, and, only a few days after I'd been made 'lance,' Croft likewise got his stripe. Then I blossomed out as full-corporal, and, almost directly, Croft did the same; so we were running a neck-and-neck race for the promotion stakes, as you might say.

"Truth to tell, when I heard that Croft was sweet on Carrie Sanders, it didn't worry me much. For—though I say it that shouldn't—I was a passable-looking young fellow at one time, while Croft was what we used to call 'a bit of a slouch.' He always looked dismal—in fact, his men called him 'Dismal Jimmy,'—and, altogether, he seemed the last man in the world a lively young gal like Carrie would take a liking to.

"Howsomever, I soon found out that she did see something in him; and when I heard that he'd walked out with her three nights running, I came to the conclusion that Corporal James Croft was a more dangerous rival than I'd given him credit for being.

"I'm not going to describe in detail how things went on for the next month or two.

"You all know what the courting business is, and when I've said that one hour I walked on air, and the next was down in the deepest dumps, you'll understand my lovesick state.

"The fact was, Carrie Sanders played me and Croft off against each other, and if I hadn't been so blessed green, I should have known that I was the favoured party. But, like a fool, I let her see I was jealous, and the more I did that the more she flirted with Croft.

"So things went on, until one night, Croft stopped me and challenged me to fight for the girl. It appeared that he had popped the question to Carrie, and she had refused him.

"At that he angrily accused her of having kept him dangling at her bow in case 'that fellow Pollard' (meaning me) jilted her. Then she fired up in her turn, and told him that if he could prove himself a better man than Corporal Pollard, she'd marry him right away. All this Carrie told me long afterwards.

"I readily accepted Croft's challenge, and a few evenings afterwards we fought for Carrie Sanders in a meadow a mile or two away from barracks. The scrap lasted only three rounds—hot rounds they were too; for, if neither of us displayed much science, we managed to exchange some precious hard blows.

"It was more by luck than skill that I eventually knocked my man out with a swinger on the side of his head.

"Luckily for me, he'd put in most of his work about the ribs, and my face was practically undamaged. Croft, on the other hand, had a badly-bruised nose and a pair of black eyes; which meant a day in the hospital, followed by reduction to the ranks. And if Croft or either of our seconds split, it meant reduction for me also—and then it was all up with my chance of marrying Carrie Sanders.

"Well, me and my second started back to barracks, leaving Croft and a 'lance-jack' named Barrett, who'd

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sponged him down, to follow us when it got darker. Barrett turned up all right; Croft didn't. After walking some distance towards the barracks, Croft had remarked that if they were seen together, Barrett would probably lose his stripe for being concerned in the fight. He therefore suggested that they should take separate roads; to which Barrett agreed, and passed the sentry just before 'first post' sounded. He lived in the same room as Croft, and for half the night he lay awake wondering why the corporal didn't make his appearance.

"But never more was James Croft seen inside Burchester Barracks. He had deserted!

He started to open the letter.

"There was the usual hue and cry; but he wasn't to be found, and in due time active search for him was abandoned.

"Nobody except myself and the seconds knew about our little sparring affair, and, for our own sakes, we kept the secret well.

"As soon as I was made sergeant, old Bob Sanders agreed to my splicing his daughter. The wedding took place, and we had a happy year or so. Then came the war in Afghanistan, from which I was invalided home, minus an arm. My pension wasn't, of course, sufficient to keep a home going, so as billets for one-armed chaps wasn't plentiful, I reckoned it safest to join the Corps of Commissionaires.

"And now, in order to wind up my yarn, I must make a big jump from '81 to the day before yesterday.

"Most of you know that I'm messenger at some big offices in the City. Well, two days ago, one of the clerks hands me a letter and tells me to deliver it at once, and wait for an answer. The letter was addressed to Lord —— well, I mustn't mention names, or I might get into trouble, so we'll call him Lord Blank. I jumped on a Piccadilly 'bus, which put me down near the street in which Lord Blank lived. I soon found the house, and rang the bell. A footman was just opening the door, when up drives a pair-horse carriage, out of which steps a tip-top swell, wearing a tall hat, a fur-lined coat, and an eyeglass.

"'Here's his lordship himself,' whispers the footman to me, and, holding the letter ready, he stands waiting while the swell comes up the steps.

"'The commissionaire's just brought this, my lord, and says he is to wait for an answer,' explains the chap in livery.

"'Oh, very well,' replies my lord, and started to open the letter just inside the hall. Then he chanced to look at me, and I saw him give a bit of a start. At the same moment I gave a start, too; for in spite of the change which years had brought about, I knew him again directly, and he knew me.

"Lord Blank was no other than my old rival—Corporal Croft, the deserter!

"His lordship didn't finish opening the envelope. He quietly asked me to follow him into his library; where he sat down, read his letter carefully, scribbled a reply, and, as he handed me the note to take back to the City, remarked:

"'I see you've lost a limb since we met last, Pollard.'

"'Yes, my lord, lost it in Afghanistan,' answers I.

"'Couldn't knock me out in three rounds now, eh?' he says, without the ghost of a smile on his queer-looking phiz.

"'P'raps not, my lord; I'm a bit handicapped,' says I, looking just as solemn as himself.

"'And how was Miss Sanders when you saw her last?' he asks.

"'Mrs. Pollard was in the best of health, my lord, when I left her just after eight o'clock this morning.'

"'Ah!' says my lord, very dry, 'happy to hear it, I'm sure. Good morning, sergeant!' and he touches the bell.

"Just as the footman was shewing me out of the library, Lord Blank slips a five-pound note into my hand, and as I 'ain't a proud man, I didn't offer any objections.

"And that gentlemen," concluded the commissionaire, "about finishes my yarn. Corporal Croft, it appears, was a 'gentleman ranker' after all. I found out yesterday that the present Lord Blank succeeded to the peerage about ten years ago. At the time he enlisted, there were well-nigh a dozen lives between him and the title. His was a very poor branch of the family, and his father had married very humble.

"I gave that 'fiver' to the missus, and told her it was a tip I got from Lord Blank; but I didn't tell her that his lordship was an old acquaintance of hers. You see the worry of bringing up a big family on very little money, has sharpened Mrs. Pollard's tongue a bit. When she's in one of her bad-tempered fits, she's apt to be rather trying. If once Carrie learnt that she might now have been a 'my lady,' instead of a poor commissionaire's missus, I should never hear the last of it."

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FOR THE BUSH CONTINGENT.

I.

It was on a Saturday afternoon early in January, 1900. A number of men had gathered round the stock-yard at Bringenbogie Station. Three of the smartest men on Bringenbogie were about proceeding to Sydney to volunteer for the bushmen's contingent, and the owner, Mr. M'Kinnon, had given them the pick of the station horses, and was otherwise providing for each a full outfit.

They had already chosen their horses, and the fine unbroken filly now in the yard was there merely incidentally. But as she was there, Ivey—otherwise Owen—O'Neill, one of the volunteers and the crack rough-rider on the station, must needs proceed with her handling. She was one of a number that had got away weeks before into the Wild Horse Gullies, and only two days ago, after a very merry ride, had the stockmen yarded her.

The talk round the yard was all of war, interspersed with words of wisdom relative to horseflesh, and in particular the filly now in hand.

Presently, with unassuming air, a selector who lived some distance away rode up.

"Here's Joe Larkin," said Jack Sutton, another of the volunteers, who saw Joe first. "Hello, Joe. Good-day, Joe!" he sang out.

"Good-day, Joe!" cried another. "'Day, Joe!" bawled a third, and, amid much merriment, round swept a repeating chorus of "Good-day, Joe," drawn forth principally by the entire simplicity of Joe's appearance.

Quite abashed by the tumult his unassuming advent had made, Joe advanced to a group at the fence, put one foot and one arm each on a rail, and in a voice as unassuming as his appearance replied to his laughing and calling associates. He did not seem to realise that there was a joke on at his expense, and turned his soft violet eyes and serious kind face from one to the other in perfect good faith.

Joe rarely smiled, but when he did there was a peculiar winsomeness about the smile. It seemed to throw sunshine through the light cloud of brown beard which, soft and curly and virgin, no razor had touched. He wore an old tweed coat, a Crimean shirt, moleskin trousers, hob-nailed boots, and one spur.

"Here's the man for the bush contingent," cried Sutton. "A man of blood from his youth up, eh, Joe?"

"That's him," cried Bob Archer, the flash man of the run. "The wrathful dove ain't a patch on him."

"Let's put him through the riding test," said Jack Archer, Bob's brother. "Jump on this filly, Joe. Look at her, the beauty. Her tail has curls in it just like your beard."

"Never you mind Joe's beard," called out Ivey O'Neill. "It's soft, an' the girls like it, don't they, Joe?"

Joe listened quietly to the banter. At last—

"Why don't you volunteer an' come along wi' us, Joe?" inquired Ivey.

"I have volunteered," said Joe. "I wrote away yesterday that I'd be in Sydney next week."

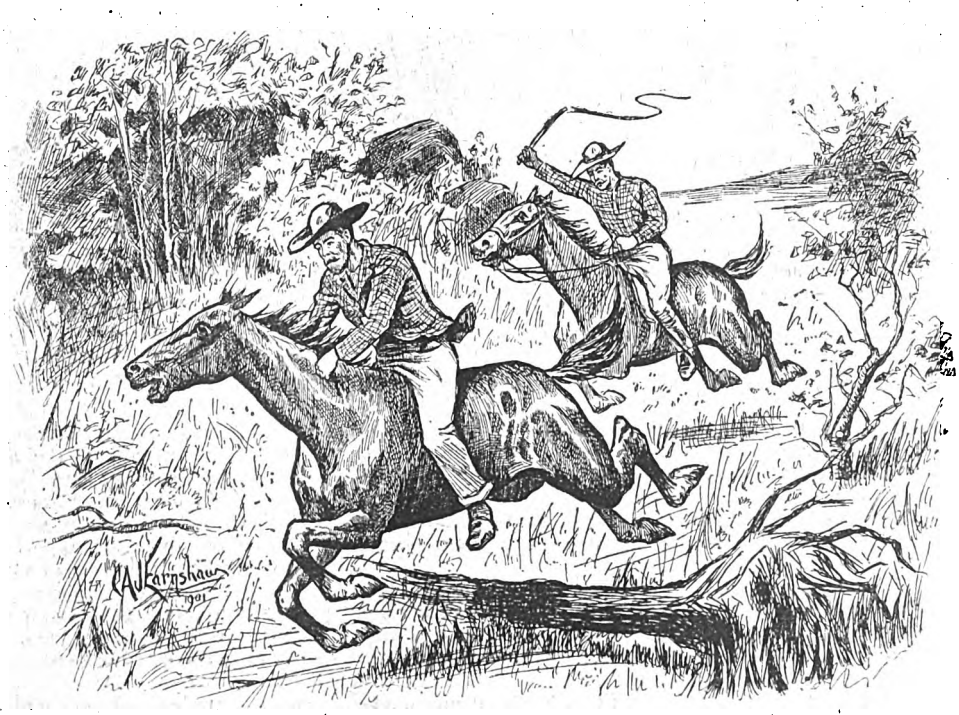
"You? Good lad!" cried Sutton, grasping Joe's hand.

Then there was more or less of an uproar, ending with "Three cheers for Joe."

Joe stood up very straight. He was of a type that can go all day and night, sleep anywhere and eat anything—light, muscular, and wiry.

"The boss might give you a horse, Joe, same as us," said Sutton.

"I'd like that filly," said Joe, watching Ivey dexterously working his way about her.



On they flew, the filly putting forth all her powers.

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"She'd break your neck first thing. You don't profess to be a rider, do you?" said Bob Archer, who was a comparatively newcomer to the district.

Joe's violet eye showed a trace of lightning.

"I think I could show you the way," he said quietly.

Several of the men applauded him, and rather warm words flashed between him and Archer.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Joe at last, in the same quiet tone. "We'll take that filly out now to the Wild Horse Gullies an' let her go there with me on her, an' no saddle or bridle, and I'll bet that you an' your two brothers there can't run me in."

The other men again backed Joe, and Archer took up the challenge almost compulsorily.

Having obtained Mr. M'Kinnon's consent, the men set off for the chosen spot—rough, open country, which in former days had swarmed with wild horses.

Ivey led the filly, Sutton backing him up, while Joe jogged along on his rough little mare, looking like anything but a wild horse tamer.

The conditions were that Archer and his two brothers were to run Joe into the stockyard, near the gate leading into the Wild Horse Gullies, Joe undertaking not to prevent the filly's turning whenever fairly wheeled. He was to get a start of a furlong from the others half-a-mile from the yard, and was to be yarded within three hours.

When the starting point was reached Sutton gave Joe a quick hoist upon the back of the blindfolded filly, and at the same time Ivey pulled off the fold and halter.

The mare bounded forward like beauty and strength gone mad. Joe sat her splendidly, as plunging and terrified, and crashing over fallen timber and through scrub, she made for her well known gullies.

The Archers started forward. Bob, who was on a horse that he particularly fancied, pressed on ahead to take the first wheel, his brothers being content to keep in sight for a time.

Then followed some magnificent riding. Straight down a rocky hill thundered Joe, Archer following no less gallantly, and taking advantage of a risky short cut. Behind came his brothers, and then eight or ten horsemen eager to see the fun.

For a mile and a half the utmost that Archer could do was to keep Joe well in sight. Then, by taking advantage of another short cut, he drew close up. The filly was making for a well-known gap, and Archer's great object was to prevent her going down it.

Straight and fast he rode, while the filly, afraid, made a slight detour in spite of Joe's efforts to steer her. On they flew, the filly—by this time desperate but with recovered senses—putting forth all her powers, while Archer did the same.

Nearer they drew to the gap—almost reached it—and then, at the last moment, Archer's advantageous straight run came to his aid. His whip rang out, as with a "Whoa back there!" he wheeled the filly from the entrance to the gap.

Onward to the left she pressed along an old fence, but Jack Archer, cutting across from the rear, wheeled her again a quarter of a mile further on. She took a turn behind him, and with deep-drawn breath fairly outpaced his stock horse, and drew ahead on the course from which he had tried to turn her.

"Squad, right turn! Dismiss!"

Then in came the third rider, Dick Archer, getting so close that he lashed at the filly with his whip, and pressed her hard for three hundred yards. She was heading for a break-neck track, and Joe, his shirt torn and his face bleeding from scratches, crammed her at it. Down into a precipitous gully she bounded, her perilous descent getting her fairly away from her pursuers.

The last the spectators saw was the filly toiling up a distant and rocky pathway, while two of the Archers, on their nearly blown horses, followed three hundred yards in the rear. Bob Archer was limping home without his horse.

Joe was not yarded, but half-an-hour after the expiration of the time limit he rode the filly, dripping and at a jog, up to the spot from which he had started.

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He stayed at the men's quarters that night, and was made much of. But an attempt to get a speech out of him was an absolute failure.

Later in the evening Mr. M'Kinnon came along.

"Well, Joe, I hear the riding exercise has been successful this afternoon; also that you are volunteering for South Africa?"

"Yes, sir," answered Joe.

"Then take your pick of the station horses. Have you any fancy?"

"I'd like that filly—well," said Joe, looking at Mr. M'Kinnon in his simple, steadfast way.

"Take her, my lad, and welcome," was the reply.

II.

Joe was one of two sons. His father was an idle, humorous man, who periodically drank himself blind. His brother Fred was an idle man without the humour, who drank rather more than his father, and was regarded as generally useless.

Joe, who, like many bushmen, neither drank nor smoked, had been a kind of free slave to the rest of the family all his life. His mother was a woman who had suffered bitter hardship, and came out with a bitter spirit and tongue. Joe recognised the hard battle she had fought, and stood by her loyally, though her grumbling was directed principally against him.

Fred alone escaped her tongue, careless whether he did or not, and Joe felt, not without passing anger, that a great deal of the hard-earned money which he handed his mother went to Fred. He felt also that his mother would be determinedly opposed to his leaving, and often thought, with a cut-off-his-nose-to-spite-his-face sense of duty, that he ought to stay at home and keep things together. But an indefinable longing was upon him to go and see and do, and go he must.

He felt sure of the sympathy of his father, who himself was an old soldier. When he reached home on the day after his ride on the filly, Joe went straight to his father. The old man held himself like a soldier, for all his lame leg and absolute deafness—arising from his having slept with it in a mud puddle all night—of one ear. "And I wish he was deaf in the other, too," his wife often said.

Old Larkin was enthusiastic over the matter.

"You go, Joe," he said. "Women always want men to stay at home, more's the pity. Look here, Joe, you've s'aved here half your life, supportin' your —— drunken old father an' your beautiful brother. Now, I'll put the peg in, an' look after the place, an' serve the gran' old country over the sea once more by makin' it so that my flesh and blood can fight for her. You go, an' get a slappin' mouthful of raw, rank, big, enticin' life. It called to me just the same when I was young, an' the call must be answered. Ah, but if I was young again! You'll go for me. Your mother may or may not object to this project. I think she will, so it's likely she won't. She's in laager over at the pigstye now. I'll beat about out o' range while you tackle her. Perhaps I may git in the kitchen, and cut her off from her base."

Joe smiled half sadly at his father's words. He knew that the old man, but for drink, might have done much, but—the tree had fallen.

He went straight to his mother and told her briefly and simply what he had done. To his surprise she listened quietly.

"I part expected this, Joe," she said, when he had finished. "They tell me them Boers fire on women an' children, and murder men under the white flag, an' fire on our poor wounded laddies. You go, Joe. I can spare ye for this. I'm a daughter of Old England, an' you're my son."

"Good old woman," roared her husband from near at hand. "Squad, 'shun! Present—arms!"

Up went the spade he had in his hands in the true old military suit.

"Of all the old fools!" cried his wife, perhaps more vexed at being caught speaking feelingly than at anything else. "Didn't I tell you to finish that diggin', you old fool, ye? Always idle an' talkin'. Now Joe's goin' you'll have to put out another foot, I assure ye."

As her words pelted the old man he grinned jovially.

"Now ye see what it is to be steady under fire, Joe," he said, with his spade at the shoulder. "Squad, right—tarn! Dismiss!"

And off he hobbled, chuckling to himself.

Joe left for Sydney two days later. To his surprise Fred offered to ride with him to the railway town twenty miles distant.

"I'll like to go with you altogether, Joe," he said in his sullen-faced way as he grasped his brother's hand in farewell. "But the Queen doesn't want men who can't keep sober for a fortnight at a stretch."

Then, full of pity and wonder, from the carriage window Joe watched him, a pathetic, aimless figure, standing loosely on the platform as the train left.

Some time later Mr. M'Kinnon, driving past, found Joe at work on the old place.

"Hello! I thought you'd gone to the war!" he exclaimed.

Joe drew back and surveyed the post-hole he was digging, spat on his hands, then picked up the crowbar, and drove it home.

"Didn't pass, sir. They reckoned I couldn't ride," was his brief reply.

An Unfortunate Incident.

"Well," said the family doctor to little Willie's anxious father, who had sent for him in great haste, "and what is the matter with your son?"

With a voice choked with emotion, the fond parent replied:

"It happened like this, I gave Willie 3s. 6d. to spend yesterday, and he went straight to the nearest bookseller and purchased a copy of 'The New Master,' by Arnold Golsworthy ('Jingle' of *Pick-Me-Up*), and what with the fun of the story and the screamingly humorous illustrations by Tom Browne, *he has split his sides with laughing*, and I want to know whether you will be able to mend them."

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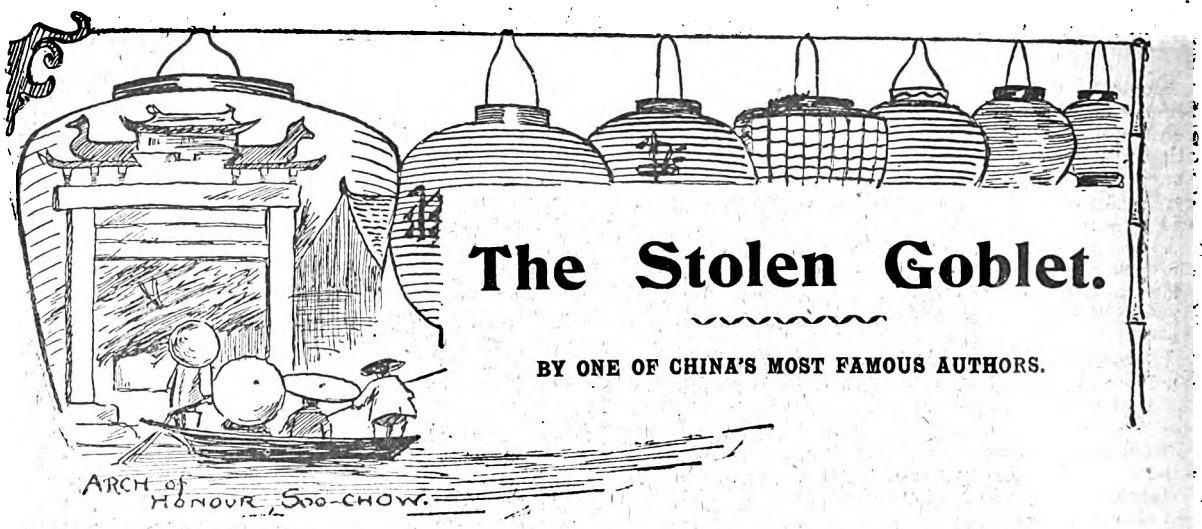

The Stolen Goblet.

BY ONE OF CHINA'S MOST FAMOUS AUTHORS.

The following story is by P'u Liu Hsien, one of China's most famous authors. He began to write romances when quite a boy. His best known work—from which this sample story is taken—is called in China the Liao Chai Chih Yi, and the fame of the book is supposed to rest upon the beauty of its style. Most European readers would perhaps scarcely indorse China's favourable verdict in this matter. It is an interesting fact, however, that though Chinese literary men are, or pretend to be, contemptuous of anything in the shape of novels or tales, they make an exception in favour of this work. Without regard to the interest of the story, we present it to our readers as a literary curiosity.

ONCE upon a time, in the town of Li-cheng, there lived a poor scholar named Yin. In the place where he lived there was a large stretch of ground, in the midst of which stood a handsome house with outhouses and courtyards attached.

These buildings were uninhabited and gradually falling into decay; while it was currently reported that the place was haunted, and that strange and fearful sights were to be seen there.

Now Yin was one day dining with some of his fellow-students, and this haunted house became the subject of the conversation. One of his companions remarked: "If any one among us will venture to sleep a night in the haunted house the rest of us will buy him a dinner, and let him order it."

Yin, on this, jumped up and cried: "Who's afraid? I will take my bedding and go there at once."

His companions took him at his word, and so Yin got his bed ready, and they escorted him to the entrance of the haunted garden, where they took leave of him, telling him to shout for help if he saw anything dreadful.

Yin laughed and assured them that whatever he saw he would catch, and bring away with him for a curiosity. So saying he went inside.

The moon at this time was in the first quarter, and it was only just possible to discover the entrance into this house by its feeble light; but after some trouble, Yin succeeded in getting in. He went upstairs into a big room, where he determined to sleep. He sat for some time waiting for something to happen, and watching the thin, new moon sinking behind the western hills. Nothing extraordinary occurred, so he spread out his bedding and went to sleep.

Presently a man dressed as a servant, and bearing in his hand a lamp shaped like a lotus-flower, entered the room, and on seeing Yin lying there started back, and then ran to the stairhead and told his companions that a man was lying there.

They asked him who the stranger was; but, as he could not tell them, an old gentleman, who appeared to be the master of the house, came up. This individual, after a long look at the sleeper, turned to his followers and said:

"This is a gentleman named Yin, a good scholar, who will be a great man one of those days. We need not mind him in the least, for he has a good heart, and even if our noise awakes him, he will be perfectly friendly with us."

When he had finished speaking, the doors of the house were thrown open and a large crowd of people flocked in. The lamps were lighted in all directions, until every room was as bright as day. Yin felt that it was foolish to pretend to be asleep any longer, so he began to toss backwards and forwards, and to make a noise as though he were clearing his throat.

The master of the house at once came forward, and, making a low bow, addressed him thus:

"Your servant has a poor daughter who is to be married to-night. We did not expect to have the honour of your company, and I trust therefore that you will not be angry with us for disturbing you."

Yin got up in a hurry and made a low bow in return, and replied:

"I was unaware of these festivities to-night. Had I known I would have come prepared, and would have brought a wedding gift."

"Your presence," rejoined the old man, "is better than any wedding gift, for it drives away all evil influences. I shall, therefore, be grateful if you will give us the honour of your company."

Yin accepted the invitation with much pleasure, and then he and his host betook themselves to another room, where everything was laid out with the greatest splendour.

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Here was a lady of some forty years of age, who came forward to greet Yin, and was introduced by the old gentleman as his wife. Just then a sound of horns and other instruments was heard, and a servant came in to announce the arrival of the bridegroom. The old gentleman went to the door to receive his son-in-law, and introduced him to Yin.

It was not long before the ladies flocked in in a bevy, and then the servants brought in the supper. But in addition to eatables the board was decked with jewelled bowls and gold cups, in which wine was handed to the guests.

Yin observed the bride closely, and thought that she must be the fairest woman in the world, but just then the current of his thoughts changed, because the wine was being handed round in magnificent golden goblets. each of which would contain several measures of wine.

As one of these came within his reach he slipped it up his sleeve and then leant his head on the table as though he had fallen into a drunken sleep. Shortly afterwards the company broke up.

The old gentleman now ordered the servants to clear the tables, and one of the large gold cups was found to be missing. Search was made everywhere. One of the servants remarked that perhaps the sleeping stranger had taken it, but the host bade him angrily to be quiet and not to make a fool of himself by insulting his guests.

The old gentleman and his followers then took their departure, leaving Yin still sitting at the table. When they were gone, Yin got up. The place was now, of course, pitch dark, and he might have thought all his adventures a dream had it not been that he had the cup up his sleeve.

In a short time the eastern sky began to grow red and the day to break, so he rolled up his bedding and walked down to the gate, where he found his friends waiting for him. Yin told them his adventures, and produced his golden cup.

A few years after these occurrences Yin took his doctoral degree, and was appointed to an office in Fei Chiu, in the Province of Honan. At that place lived a rich man named Chu. He invited Yin to dinner one day, and ordered the servants to put out the best gold cups.

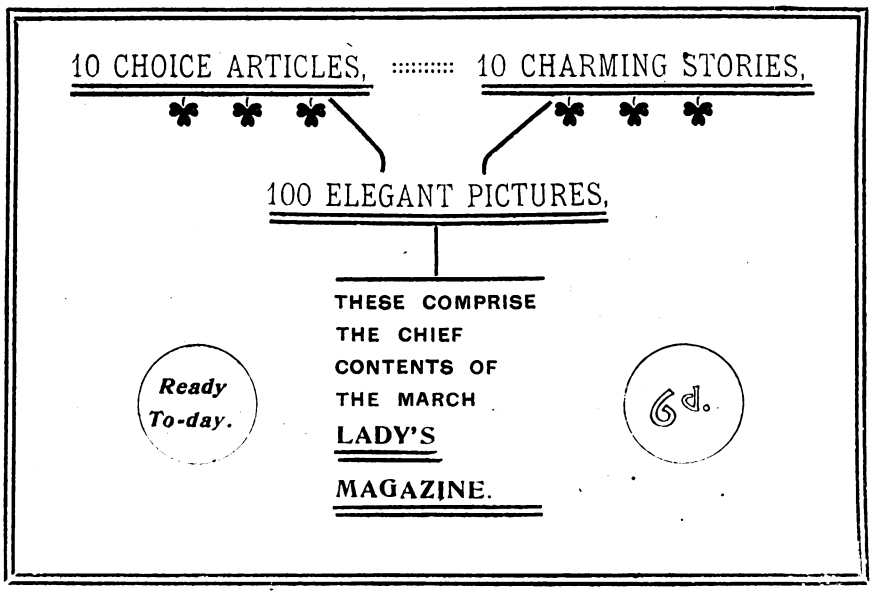
It was some time before this order was obeyed, and while the cups were being placed on the table, the butler whispered something to his master, which seemed to disconcert him considerably. Seven large gold cups were now handed round, and Yin saw to his astonishment that they were exactly like the goblet which he had stolen at the marriage feast in the haunted house. He turned to his host and asked him where he had procured these cups.

"My father," replied Chu, "had an office in Pekin, and, when there, happened to hear of a goldsmith whose work was considered wonderfully artistic and elegant. My father commissioned him to make a set of eight drinking cups, which cups have since come down to me as a heirloom in our family. I regret to say, however, that though the box which holds these cups has been locked and sealed for fifteen years, one of the golden goblets has mysteriously disappeared. I don't understand it at all. I believe one of my servants must have stolen it and forged my seals."

"Possibly," replied Yin with a laugh, "the cup itself made wings and flew away. But I know what I will do. I have a goblet at home of the same pattern as this, and, as a single cup is of no use to me, I will send it to you to complete your set."

Chu expressed thanks, and Yin on his return home sent the stolen cup to his friend, with a full account of how he had obtained it.

Moral: Sooner or later stolen things revert to their proper owners.



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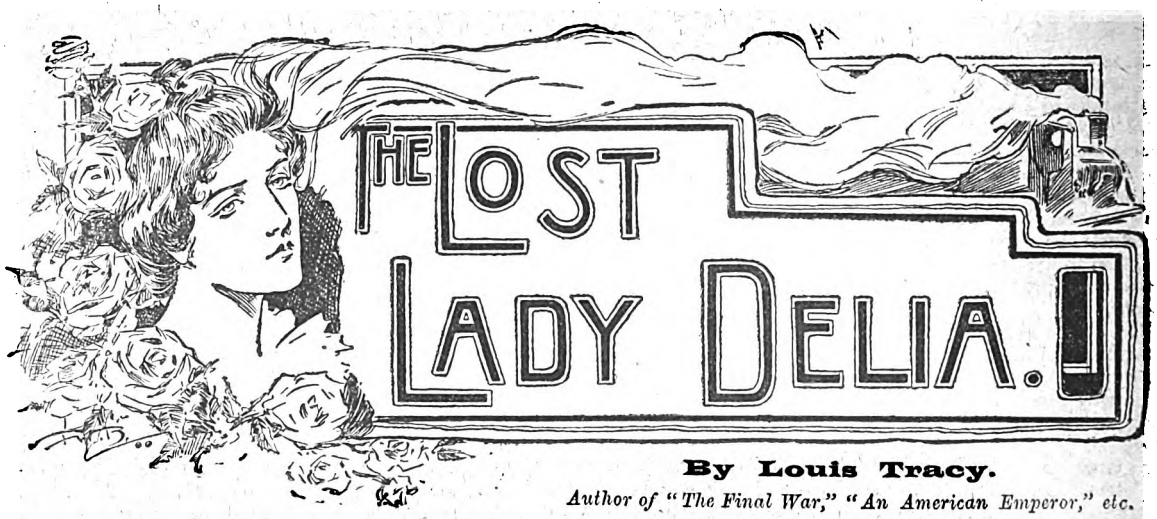

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

CHAPTER XXV. (*continued*).

His visitor was so utterly disconsolate that Brett was at a loss to know how to deal with him.

He felt that if Mensmore would but speak regarding Mrs. Hilmer's strange delusion, and the cause of it, all these difficulties and disasters would disappear. He resolved to try a direct attack.

"Have you ever heard of a Colonel Montgomery?" he said suddenly, bending his searching gaze on the other's downcast face.

The effect was electrical.

Mensmore was so taken aback that he was spellbound. He looked at Brett, the picture of astonishment, before he stammered:

"I—you—who told you about him?"

"He was your sister's friend, adviser, and confidant," he replied sternly. "He it is who, in some way, is bound up with Lady Delia's disappearance."

Mensmore rose excitedly.

"I cannot discuss the matter with you," he cried, "I have given my sacred promise, and no matter what the cost may be I will not break my word."

"I do not press you. But may I see Mrs. Hilmer again? When she is calmer I might reason with her."

The other placed his hand on Brett's shoulder, and his voice was very impressive, though shaken with some strong emotion:

"Believe me," he said, "it is better that you should not see her. It will be useless. She is leaving London, not to avoid consequences, but to get away from painful memories. Her departure will be quite open, and her place of residence known to anyone who cares to inquire. One thing she is immovable in. She will never reveal to a living soul what she knows of Lady Delia's death. She would rather suffer at the hands of the law any punishment that might be meted out to her."

"Don't you understand that this man, Montgomery, is now known to the police. Sooner or later he will be found and asked to explain any connection he may have had with the crime. Why not accomplish quietly that which will perforce be done through the uncompromising channels of Scotland Yard?"

"Your reasoning appears to be good, but——"

"But folly must prevail?"

"Put it that way if you like."

"So this wretched imbroglio may cost you the love of a charming and devoted girl?"

"Heaven help me, it may—probably will."

"I swear to you," cried the barrister, who was unusually excited, "that I will tear the heart out of this mystery before the week expires."

Mensmore bowed silently and would have left the room, but Smith entered. In their distraction they had not heard the bell ring. Smith handed a card to his master. Instantly Brett controlled himself. His admiration for the dramatic sequence of events overcame his eagerness as an actor. It was with an appreciative smile that he said, without the slightest reference to Mensmore:

"Show the lady in."

Mensmore was passing out, but the sight of the visitor drove him back as though he had been struck. It was Phyllis Browne.

Her recognition of him was a bright smile. She advanced to Brett, saying pleasantly:

"I am glad to meet you, though the manner of my call is somewhat unconventional. I heard much of you from Bertie in the Riviera, and more since my return to town."

Brett suitably expressed his delight at this apparition. Mensmore, not knowing what to do, stood awkwardly at the other end of the room.

Neither of the others paid the least heed to him.

"Of course I had a definite object in coming to see you, Mr. Brett,' went on the young lady. "I have been coolly told that, because somebody killed somebody else some months ago, a young gentleman who asked me to be his wife, is not only not going to marry me but intends to spend the rest of his life in Central Africa or China—anywhere in fact but where I may be."

"A most unwise resolve," said the barrister.

"So I thought. You appear to hold the key of the situation, Mr. Brett; and as it is an easy matter to trace you through the Directory, here I am. My people think I am skating at St. James'."

"Well, Miss Browne," said Brett, "I am neither judge nor jury nor counsel for the prosecution, but there is the culprit. I hand him over to you."

"Yes, but that goose didn't kill anybody, did he?"

"No."

"And I am sure his sister did not; from what little I saw of her she would not hurt a fly."

"Quite true."

"Then why don't you find the man who caused all the mischief—and—and—lock him up at least, so that he can't go on injuring people?"

Miss Phyllis was very brave and self-confident at the outset. Now she was on the verge of tears, for Mensmore's

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saddened face and depressed manner unnerved her more than his passionate words at their last interview.

"You ask me a straight question," replied Brett, though his eyes were fixed on Mensmore, "and I will give you a straight answer. I *will* find the man who killed Lady Delia. As you say, it is time his capacity for doing injury to others should be limited. Before many days have passed, Mr. Mensmore will come to you and beg your pardon for his hasty and quite unwarranted resolve."

"Do you hear that, Bertie?" cried the girl. "Didn't I tell you so?"

Mensmore came forward to her side of the table.

"I need not wait, Phil, dear," he said simply. "I ask your pardon now. This business is in the hands of Providence. I was foolish to think that anything I could do would stave off the inevitable."

"And if you have—to go—to China—you w-will take me with you?"

Brett looked out of the window, whistled, and said loudly, addressing a beautiful lady in short skirts who figured in a poster across the way:

"Let me ring for some tea. All this talk makes one dry."

CHAPTER XXVI.

Lady Helen Montgomery's Son.

When the young people had gone out—Mensmore ill at ease, though tremulously happy that Phyllis had so demonstrated her trust in him, Phyllis herself radiantly confident in the barrister's powers to set everything right—Brett devoted himself to the task of determining a new line for his energies.

The first step was self-evident. He must ascertain if the Lyles knew a Colonel Montgomery.

He drove to the club frequented by Sir Charles, in the first place; but the baronet was not there, so he went to Wensley House.

Sir Charles was at home, in his accustomed nook by the library fire. He looked ill and low-spirited. The temporary animation he had displayed during the past few weeks was gone. If anyth ng, he was more listless than at any time since his wife's death.

"Well, Brett," he said, "anything to report?"

"Yes, a good deal."

"What is it?"

"I want to ask you something. Did you ever know a Colonel Montgomery, or was your wife acquainted with anyone of that name to your knowledge?"

"I do not think she was. Had she ever met such a man I should probably have heard of him. Who was he?"

The baronet's low state rendered his words careless and indefinite, but his friend did not wish to bother him unduly.

"The police have discovered," he said, "that Mrs. Hilmer formed a close intimacy with someone whom she designated by that name and rank, though I have failed to trace any British officer who answers to his description. He disappeared, or died, as some people put it, about the same time as your wife."

"Is it not known what became of him then?"

"No."

"Won't Mrs. Hilmer tell you?"

"She absolutely refuses to give any help whatever."

"On what ground?"

"That is best known to herself. My theory is that a man she loves is implicated in this affair, and she is prepared to go to any lengths to shield him."

"Ah!"

Sir Charles bent over and poked the fire viciously. Then he murmured: "Women are queer creatures, Brett. We men never understand them until too late. My wife and I

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never cared a jot for one another whilst she lived, to all appearance. Yet I now realise that she loved me, and I would give the little remaining span of existence, dear as life is, to see her once more."

This was a morbid subject, so Brett tried to switch him off it.

"It is almost clear to me," he said, "that this Colonel Montgomery's name was assumed. Few people realise the use of the alias made in modern life. I have a notion that the custom amongst otherwise honourable people has arisen from the publicity given to the fact that Royal and other distinguished personages frequently choose to conceal their identity under less known territorial titles."

"The idea is ingenious. We are all slaves of fashion."

"However that may be, it should not be a difficult task to lay hands on this gentleman should he be still living."

"Suppose you succeed. How can you connect him with my wife's death?"

"At this moment I am unable to say. But the cabman might be of some use."

"The cabman. What cabman?"

"Did I omit that? I ought to have told you that I have found the driver of the four-wheeler in which poor Lady Delia was taken, dead or insensible, from Sloane Square to Putney."

"What an extraordinary thing!"

"What is?"

"That you should have forgotten to inform me of such a striking fact."

"Not so. Now that I recollect, I have not had the opportunity. It was impossible to discuss anything else but that letter on the last two occasions we met, and it was only a few hours prior to your visit on Monday that I got the cabman's story fully. By the way, do you now see any reason why Jane Harding should have tried to deceive you in such a manner?"

The barrister perceived that Sir Charles was nervous and irritable, so he deemed it a needless strain to enlarge on the history of his discovery of Foxey.

"I am tired of letters, and plots, and mysteries. My life is resolving itself into one huge note of interrogation. Soon the great question of eternity will dominate all others."

Lyle's mood unfitted him for sustained conversation. Brett could but pity him, and hope that time would calm his fevered brain, and still the unrest that shed this gloom over him.

"Really," said Reggie after a long interval, during which both men sought inspiration from the dancing flames in the fire-place, "really this is too bad of you, Lyle. You showed a marked improvement for a little space, and now you are letting yourself slip back into a state of lonely and unoccupied moping again."

"My thoughts find me both occupation and company," was the despondent reply.

"There is nothing for it," continued Brett cheerfully, "but a tour round the world. You must start immediately. A complete change of scene and surroundings will soon pull you back to a normal state of mind and health."

"I have been thinking of a long journey for some time past."

The barrister glanced sharply at his friend. The *double entendre* was not lost on him. Lyle was in a very depressed and nervous condition. The uncertainty regarding his wife's fate was harassing him unduly, and it was with a twinge of conscience that Brett reflected upon his own eagerness to pursue a quest which, by very reason of its indefiniteness, attracted him as an intellectual pursuit.

"Look here, Lyle," he cried, on the spur of the moment, "I have long desired to see the Canadian-Pacific route. Will you arrange to start West with me a fortnight hence? We will return when the spirit moves us."

"We will see. We will see. To-day I feel unable to decide anything."

"Yes, I know, but the mere fact that you take the resolution will serve to re-animate you."

"It is very good of you, Brett, to trouble so about me. Had you asked me earlier I might have gone straight away. But let it rest for a little while. When I have recovered my spirits somewhat I will come to you to ask you to sail next day, or something of that sort."

Beyond this Brett could not move him.

In pursuance of his promise to Phyllis Browne he lost no time in striving to finally solve the problem of Lady Delia's disappearance.

There was one link in the chain of evidence that would be irrefragable if discovered. Was this Colonel Montgomery in any way connected with the house at Putney where the murderer had disposed of the body? If this could be established the unknown visitor to Raleigh Mansions would experience a good deal of difficulty in clearing himself from suspicion, as Brett was certain that, once the "Colonel" was traced, much would come to light regarding him to explain Mrs. Hilmer's, and her brother's, dread lest his identity should be discovered.

An inquiry addressed to the house agents to whom possible tenants were referred elicited the information that the present owner, a lady, was prepared to let the house annually or on a lease. They inclosed an order to view, which Brett retained in case he should happen to need it.

A second letter gave him the address of the lady's solicitors, Messrs. Small and Sharp, Lincoln's Inn.

To them Brett betook himself on the Wednesday afternoon. He posed as a possible tenant, with a desire to purchase the property outright if this proposal could be entertained.

Mr. Sharp, the partner who dealt with this estate, became very suave when the suggestion reached his ears.

"You will understand, Mr. Brett, that your request requires some consideration. The rent my client asks is comparatively low, because the house is old-fashioned, but the splendid riparian position of the property, a freehold acre on the banks of the Thames at Putney, gives it a highly-increased future value. Any figure you may have based on a rental calculation would therefore——"

"Not meet the case at all," said Brett, repressing a smile at the familiar first move in the game of bargaining.

"Precisely."

"May I ask you who the present owner is?"

"Certainly. The lady's name is Small. In fact, she is my partner's wife. Her father, the late Rev. Septimus Childe, purchased the estate some years ago, largely because the house suited his requirements as the head of a very successful private school."

"Has the estate changed hands frequently then?"

"Oh, dear no. Indeed, it is well understood that the Rev. Mr. Childe acquired it more as a friendly transaction than otherwise. The place is a portion of the separate estate of the late Lady Helen Montgomery, who married Sir William Lyle, father of the present baronet, who perhaps—good gracious, my dear sir, what is the matter?"

Had Brett been a woman he must have fainted.

As it was, the shock of the intelligence nearly paralysed him. Sir Charles Lyle!—Montgomery!—the house at Putney the property of his mother! What new terror did not this frightful combination suggest?

Why did his friend conceal from him these most important facts? Why did he pretend ignorance not only of the locality, but of his mother's maiden name. Like lightning the remembrance flashed through Brett's troubled brain that he had only heard of the earlier Lady Lyle as a daughter of the Earl of Tilbury. A suspicion—profoundly horrible, yet convincing—was slowly mastering him, and every second brought further proof not only of its reasonableness, but of its ghastly and inflexible certainty.

(*Continued on page 348.*)

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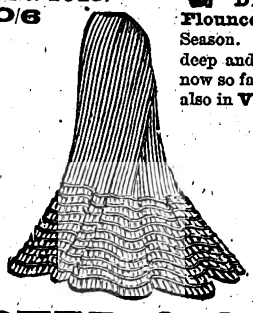

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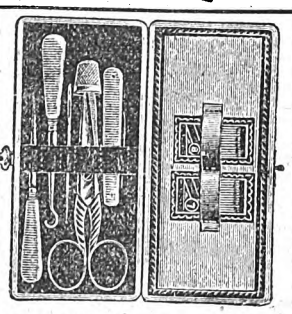

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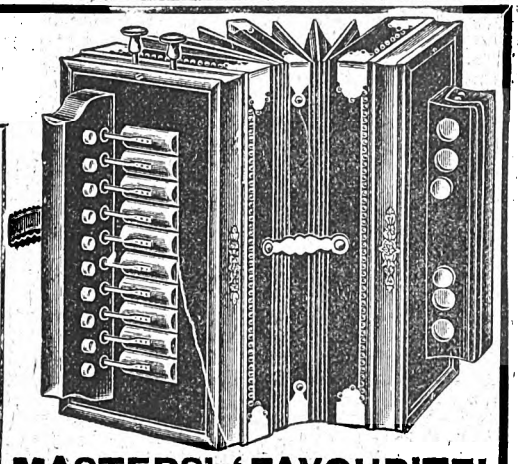

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Again the lawyer's voice reached his ears, dully and thin, as though it penetrated through a wall.

"Surely you have been taken suddenly ill? Let me get you some brandy."

"No—no," murmured the barrister. "It is but a momentary faintness. I—I think I will go out into the fresh air. Are you—quite sure—that Mr. Childe bought the property from Lady Helen Montgomery's trustees?"

"Quite sure. If you can wait even a few moments I will show you the title-deeds."

"No, thank you. I will call again. Pray excuse me."

Somehow Brett reached the quiet square of the Inn, and then plunged into the turmoil of the street. Amidst the bustle of Holborn he had a curious sensation of safety. The fiend so suddenly installed in his consciousness was less busy here suggesting strange and maddening thoughts.

Why — why — why — fifty questions beat incessantly against the barrier of agonised negation he strove to set up, but the noise of the traffic made the attack confused. Each incautious bump against a passer-by silenced a demand, each heavy crunch of a 'bus on the gravel-strewed roadway temporarily silenced a doubt.

He was so unmanned that he felt almost on the verge of tears. He absolutely dared not attempt to reason out the fearful alternative which had so fiercely thrust itself upon him.

At last he became vaguely aware that people were staring at him. Fearful lest some acquaintance should recognise and accost him he hailed a hansom and drove to Victoria Street.

All the way the steady beat of the horse's feet served to distract his thoughts. He forced himself to count the quick paces, and tried hard to accommodate the numerals of two or more syllables to the rapidity of the animal's trot. He failed in this, but in the failure found relief.

Nevertheless, though the horse was willing and the driver eager to oblige a fare who gave a "good" address, the time seemed interminable until the cab stopped in front of his door.

Once there, he slowly ascended the stairs to his own flat, told Smith to pay the cabman half-a-crown and to admit no one, and threw himself into a chair.

At last he was face to face with the troublous demon who possessed him in Lincoln's Inn, struggled with him through the crowd, and travelled with him in the hansom. Phyllis Browne should have her answer sooner than he had expected.

The man who murdered Lady Delia was Sir Charles Lyle, her husband.

"Oh, Heavens!" moaned Brett, as he swayed restlessly to and fro in his chair; "is it possible?"

He sat there for hours. Smith entered, turned on the lights and suggested tea, but received an impatient dismissal.

After another long interval, Smith appeared again, to announce that Mr. Winter had called.

"Did you not say I was out?" said Brett, his hollow tones and haggard air startling his faithful servitor considerably.

"Yes, sir—oh, yes, sir. But that's no use with Mr. Winter. He said as how he was sure you were in."

"Ask him to oblige me by coming again—to-morrow. I am very ill. I really cannot see him."

Smith left the room, but only to return and say:

"Mr. Winter says, sir, his business is of the *utmost* importance. He can't leave it; and he says you will be very sorry afterwards if you don't see him now."

"Oh, so be it," cried Brett, turning desperately to a spirit-stand to seek sustenance in a stiff glass of brandy. "Send him in."

Quite awed by the circumstances, Smith admitted the detective and closed the door upon the two standing looking at each other without a word of greeting or explanation

CHAPTER XXVII.

Mr. Winter's Method.

The policeman spoke first. "Has Jane Harding been here, then?" he said.

His words conveyed no meaning to his hearer. They were so incongruous, so ridiculously unreasoning, that Brett laughed hysterically.

"You must have seen her," cried Mr. Winter, excitedly. "I know you have learnt the truth, and in no other way that I can imagine could it have reached you."

"Learnt what truth?"

"That Sir Charles Lyle himself is at the bottom of all this business."

"Indeed. How have you blundered upon that solution?"

"Look here, Mr. Brett, this time I am right, and you know it. It was Sir Charles Lyle who killed his wife. Nobody else had anything to do with it, so far as I can guess. But if you haven't seen Jane Harding, I wonder how you found out."

"You are speaking in riddles. Pray explain yourself."

"If Sir Charles Lyle had not been out of town, the riddle would have been answered by this time in the easiest way, as I should have locked him up."

"Excellent. You remain faithful to tradition."

"Mr. Brett, please don't try to humbug me. I am quite in earnest. I have come to you for advice. Sir Charles Lyle is guilty right enough."

"And what do you want me to do?"

"To help me as to the proper course. The whole thing seems so astounding that I can hardly trust my own senses. I spoke hastily just now. I would not have touched Sir Charles before consulting you. I was never in such a mixed-up condition in my life."

Whatever the source of his information, the detective had evidently arrived at the same conclusion as Brett himself. There was nothing for it but to endeavour to calmly reason out the situation and adopt the best method of dealing with it suggested by their joint intelligence. Brett motioned the detective to a chair, imposed silence by a look, and summoned Smith. He was faint from want of food. With returning equanimity he resolved first to restore his strength, as he would need all his powers to deal with events before he slept that night.

Mr. Winter, nothing loth, joined him in a simple meal, and by tacit consent no reference was made to the one engrossing topic in their thoughts until the table had been cleared.

"And now, Mr. Winter," said Brett, "what have you found out?"

"During the last two days," was the reply, "I have been unsuccessfully trying to trace Colonel Montgomery. No matter what I did I failed. I got hold of several of Mrs. Hilmer's tradespeople, but she always pays her bills with her own cheques, and none of them had ever heard of a Colonel Montgomery. That furniture business puzzled me a lot. The change of the drawing-room set from one flat to another on November 7th, I mean. So I found out the address of the people who supplied the new articles to Mrs. Hilmer——"

"How?"

"Through the maid, Dobson. Mrs. Hilmer has given her notice to leave, and the girl is furious about it, as she appears to have had a very easy place there. I think it came to Mrs. Hilmer's ears that she talked a lot with me."

"I see. Proceed."

"Here I hit upon a slight clue. It was a gentleman who ordered the new furniture, and directed the transfer of the articles replaced from No. 61 to No. 12, Raleigh Mansions. He did this early in the morning of November 7th, and the foreman in charge of the job remembered that there was some bother about it, as neither Mrs. Hilmer nor Mr. Pyne, as Mensmore used to be called, knew anything about it to

(*Continued on page 350.*)

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A Boon to Dyspeptics.

Quoted from "The Lady."

"In these high-pressure days, when men and women alike have to work incessantly with brain and hand to hold their own in the great battle of life, it is the exception rather than the rule to find any one who does not suffer from that insiduous and most distressing complaint—Dyspepsia—in one form or another. The most general symptoms of this disease—for it invariably develops into a disease if its progress remains unchecked—are loss of Appetite on most occasions, varied by craving desires for food which is extremely indigestible; fearful Depression of Spirits, together with various aches and pains in nearly every part of the body; the digestive organs refuse to perform their offices in a perfect manner, and if neglected, the result is too often apparent in the contraction of cancer or tumour in the Stomach, abcess on the Liver, and many serious internal complications. The great remedies for these evils, if taken when Dyspepsia has not yet assumed its later and, in fact, fatal phases, are a really good tonic and a careful diet, combined with sensible Health precautions; but hitherto no entirely satisfactory tonic for Dyspeptics has been discovered, as most preparations of the kind contain iron or quinine in some form, which, though valuable preparations in many cases, are devoid of digestive qualities. The preparation known as Guy's Tonic is, however, a wonderfully efficacious remedy. It is entirely free from iron, and therefore does not induce Constipation, a most important consideration. It contains no quinine either, but is composed of Vegetable tinctures from the British Pharmacopœia, and is prepared from the formula of a London physician. It is more than a tonic, as besides strengthening the whole Nervous System and correcting a Sluggish Liver, it assists the process of Digestion in a very great degree; moreover, it is pleasant to take."

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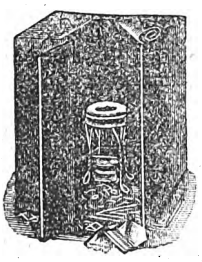

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all appearance. But the gentleman came the same morning and explained matters. It struck the foreman as funny there should be such a fearful hurry about refurnishing a drawing-room, for the gentleman did not care what the cost was so long as the job was carried out at express speed. Another odd thing was that Mrs. Hilmer paid for the articles, though she had not ordered them nor did she appear to want them. The man was quite certain that Mr. Mensmore's first knowledge of the affair came with the arrival of the first batch of articles from Mrs. Hilmer's flat, but he could only describe the mysterious agent as being a regular swell. He afterwards identified a portrait of Sir Charles Lyle as being exactly like the man he had seen, if not the man himself."

"How did you come to have a portrait of Sir Charles in your possession?"

"That appears later," said the detective, full of professional pride at the undoubtedly smart manner in which he had manipulated his facts once they were placed in order before him.

"Of course," he went on, "I jumped to the conclusion that the stranger was this Colonel Montgomery. Then, whilst closely questioning the maid about the events of November 7, she suddenly remembered that she had lost an old coat and skirt about that date. They had vanished from her room, and she had never laid eyes on them since. This set me thinking. I confronted her with the clothes worn by Lady Delia when she was found in the river, and I'm jiggered if Dobson didn't recognise them at once as being her missing property. Now, wasn't that a rum go?"

"It certainly was," said Brett, who was piecing together the story of the murder in his mind as each additional detail came to light.

"Naturally I thought harder than ever after that. It then occurred to me that Jane Harding must have had some powerful reasons for so suddenly shutting up about the identification of her mistress' underclothing. She was right enough, as we now know, in regard to the coat and skirt, but she admitted to me that the linen on the dead body was just the same as Lady Delia's. Curiously enough, it was not marked by initials, crest, or laundry-mark, and I ascertained months ago that owing to some fad of her ladyship's, all the family washing was done on the estate in Yorkshire. This explained the absence of the otherwise inevitable laundry mark."

"Thus far you are coherence itself."

"Well," said Mr. Winter complacently, "I was a long time getting to work, Mr. Brett, and had it not been for your help I should never, probably, have got at the truth, but I flatter myself that, once on the right track, I seldom leave it. However, as I was saying, I felt that Jane Harding knew a good deal more than she would tell, except under pressure, so I decided to put that pressure on."

"In what way?"

"I frightened her. Played off on her a bit of the stage business she is so fond of. This afternoon I placed a pair of handcuffs in my pocket and went to her place at Bloomsbury, having previously filled in a bogus warrant for her arrest on a charge of complicity in the murder of Lady Delia."

"It was a dangerous game, Mr. Winter!"

"Very. If it had gone wrong and had reached the ears of the Commissioner or got into the papers, I should have been reduced or dismissed. But what is a policeman to do in such cases? I was losing my temper over this infernal inquiry and never getting any real light, though always coming across startling developments. It had to end somehow, and I took the chance. The make-believe warrant and the production of handcuffs for a woman—they are never used, you know, in reality—have often been trump cards for us when everything else failed."

"This time, then, the 'properties' made up the 'show,' as Miss Harding would put it?"

"They did, and no mistake. I gave her no time to think or act. I found her sitting with her mother, admiring a new carpet she had just laid down. I said, 'Is your name Jane Harding, now engaged at the Jollity Theatre, under the alias of Marie le Marchant, but formerly a maid in the service of Lady Delia Lyle?' She grew very white and said, 'Yes,' whilst her mother clutched hold of her, terrified. Then I whipped out the warrant and the cuffs. My, but you should have heard them squeal when the bracelets clinked together. 'What has my child done?' screamed the mother. 'Perhaps nothing, madam,' I answered, 'but she is guilty in the eyes of the law just the same if she persists in screening the guilty parties.' Jane Harding was trembling and blubbering, but she said, 'It is very hard on me. I have done nothing.' I nearly trembled myself, then, as I feared that she might offer to come with me to the police-station, in which case I should have been dished. But the mother fixed the affair splendidly. 'I am sure my daughter will not conceal anything,' she said, 'and it is a shame to disgrace her in this way without telling her what it is you want to know.' I took the cue in an instant. 'I am empowered,' I said, 'to suspend this warrant, and perhaps do away with it altogether if she answers my questions fully and truthfully.' 'Why, of course she will,' said the mother, and the girl, though desperately upset, whimpered her agreement. With that I got the whole story."

"Sir Charles Lyle inspired her actions, I suppose?"

"From the very beginning almost. At first Jane Harding herself believed, when she gave evidence at the inquest, that the body she saw was not that of Lady Delia. But afterwards she changed her opinion, especially when she recalled the exact pattern and materials of the underclothing. Then my inquiries put her on the scent. Being rather a sharp girl, she jumped to the conclusion that Sir Charles Lyle knew more about the matter than he professed. In any case her place was gone and she would soon be dismissed, so she resolved on a plan even bolder than mine in threatening to lock her up. She watched her opportunity, got Sir Charles alone one day, and told him that from certain things that came to her knowledge she thought it her duty to go to the police-station. He was startled, she could see, and asked her the reason for her resolve. She said that her mistress had been killed, and she might be able to put the police on the right track. He hesitated, not knowing what to say, so she went on to explain that it would mean a lot of trouble for her, and she would prefer, if she had £500, to go to America and let the matter drop altogether. He told her that he did not want to have Lady Delia's name brought into public notoriety, and sooner than have such a thing occur he would give her the money. An hour later he handed her fifty ten-pound notes."

"What a wretched mistake," said Brett involuntarily. This unmasking of his unfortunate friend's duplicity was the most painful feature of all to him.

"Perhaps it was," replied Winter, "but the thing is not yet clear to me. That is why I am here. But to continue. The girl admitted that then she lost her head a bit. Instead of leaving the house openly, without attracting comment, she simply bolted, thus giving rise to the second sensational element attending Lady Delia's disappearance. But she resolved to be faithful to her promise. When you found her she held her tongue, and even wrote to Sir Charles to assure him that she had not spoken to a soul. He sent for her and pitched into her about not going to America, but took her address in case he should want to see her again."

"He recognised her letter-writing powers, no doubt."

(To be continued.)

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

As I expected, the subject of pretty girls, broached on this page a fortnight ago, has provoked a good deal of comment. "Admirer" (who, you may remember, opined that there were more pretty girls in Norwich than in any other place of its size) comes in for a good deal of cutting criticism.

"Why, Norwich cannot hold a candle in this respect to Ipswich," says "A. E.," "and I speak without prejudice, not being an inhabitant of either place."

"Commercial Traveller," who gets about a good deal, is of opinion that Huddersfield bears the palm for feminine beauty, while Leicester comes a moderate second.

"Jack" claims pride of place for Preston on the strength of his *fiancée's* looks. He sends me her photo and bluntly intimates that if I can tell him where he can find a prettier girl, why then, he'll be blowed!

"Jack" need not undergo the rude buffeting of Boreas or any other wind so far as I am concerned. His *fiancée* is extremely fair to look upon, and deserves to be the pride of Jack's heart and the pride of Preston. May I keep the photo, "Jack"?

❦

"This question which you are discussing is quite a fruitless one," remarks "Archie" in the course of a long letter. "In the first place, beauty is quite a matter of opinion, What is a beautiful face to one man may be to another nothing more than a plain one, and *vice versâ*. If this were not so there would be no accounting for the large number of (as I think) plain girls who are married or engaged. The fact is there are two kinds of beauty; the kind that knocks you all of a heap at first sight; and there is the other that is perhaps not apparent at first, but develops—or reveals itself—gradually as acquaintance with the subject grows. This is the more sterling beauty, the beauty that is more than 'skin deep,' that reflects the soul, fosters love, and retains possession of a man's heart once it has deeply attracted it. Mere surface beauty often fails to do this, accompanied so frequently as it is by flippancy, conceit, and shallowness of heart."

Which is a hard saying, and one with which I hasten to assure all my pretty readers, I have no desire to be associated.

"Edward P." writes to tell me that unfortunately he had in his youth but a very meagre education. What he knows he has, in a great measure, taught himself, but he finds himself lamentably ignorant on a great many subjects. This state of things he wishes to rectify. He has a laudable ambition to become a "well-read" man, and asks for hints as to a profitable course of study.

It is not easy to recommend books without knowing a man's specific tastes and requirements, but I cannot go wrong in suggesting that Chambers' Encyclopædia would probably be the best thing for my correspondent to get. It deals with every subject under the sun, and is certainly the most complete and up-to-date publication of its kind. Moreover, the *Daily Express* is offering it just now on such easy terms as to place it within the reach of even the poorest. Particulars are given on page 351.

❦

"Touchstone" is quite unable to understand why people are pleased or otherwise by music. To him one tune is like another, merely being a meaningless succession of monotonous sounds.

My correspondent probably suffers from "tone deafness," a disability which bears something of the same relation to the ear, as colour-blindness does to the eye. His is not a unique case, though the misfortune cannot be said to be common. A well-known Irish peer suffers similarly. On his own confession he is unable to distinguish, so far as the melody is concerned, between "Home, Sweet Home" and the National Anthem.

❦

Like many another person, "H. R." is desirous of making money. But not being able to earn much in his employment, he has lately sought to increase his capital by betting on horses and playing cards, with results the reverse of those for which he hoped.

Which is the order of things more often than not. "H. R." is doing a very foolish thing. Avoiding altogether the ethics of gambling, with which it is not my province to deal, I would recommend my correspondent to forswear the habit at once. The ways of the racecourse are devious, full of pitfalls for the uninitiated, and replete with every species of trick and roguery. A story in next week's *Short Stories* will vividly exemplify this.

If you must make money (and a reasonable quantity of it is a desirable acquisition), stick to work, my friend. Work hard—work, if need be, when idle folks are playing. Industry always tells in the long run.

❦

"C. Brabin, Jun." (Liverpool) has been a reader of *Short Stories* for some years, and thinks the number containing the first stories in the two new series one of the best he has seen.

For which kind and cheering words I thank him heartily, and all other readers who have written their appreciation of the new features.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 4,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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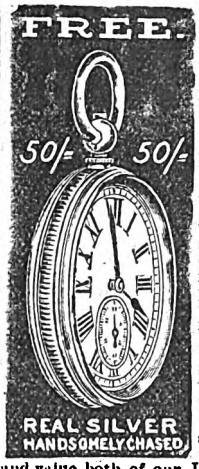

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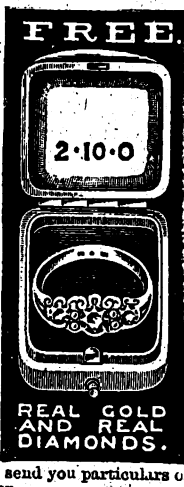

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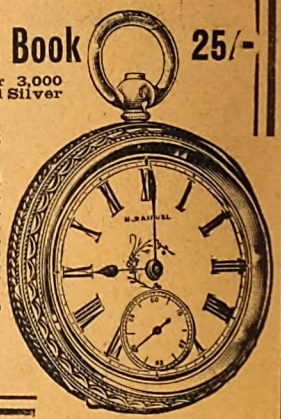

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 638.] For the Week Ending March 23rd, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

A Keeper of Secrets

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Being Days in the Professional Life of the late Mr. Hugo Pontifex, the Famous West-end Solicitor.

To those who had only met him casually in Society, the late Mr. Pontifex was a good-tempered mystery. Bluff, handsome, and, in spite of his middle-age, a little of a dandy, he seemed the last man in the world to deserve his reputation, which was that of the keenest, most audacious, and unerring of family lawyers. Fair-haired, and powerful as an athlete, his striking appearance was increased by his eyes, one of which was grey and one blue.

In reality, however, Hugo Pontifex had a wide and almost exclusively aristocratic practice. He seldom briefed a barrister, seldom set foot in a court of justice, but single handed he hunted down, captured, and safely buried mystery after mystery of terrible import to Mayfair and Belgravia.

An expert in strangling scandal, he lived a life of enthralling interest, and died a rich man. When his executors went through his papers they found nothing to satisfy their curiosity, though plenty to excite it. Hugo Pontifex knew the value of fire—and the dangers of ink. But from time to time he related to the writer, who enjoyed a certain measure of his confidence, the incidents which form the basis of the following stories. In speaking of these strange fragments of drama, Mr. Pontifex himself employed fictitious names, the present author being left to guess vainly at the identity of the genuine actors.

THE SHADOW ON THE NORRIS MILLIONS.

AMONG the most memorable of Mr. Pontifex's clients was an American, tall, spare, clean-shaven, sallow, yet good-looking—there was something about him that proclaimed his nationality even before he had opened his firm, rather melancholy mouth. He did not enter the lawyer's private room alone; with him was a woman—a woman who was unmistakably a lady.

The solicitor's glance rested appreciatively on this latter caller—she was dark, slender, singularly graceful, and not without the more usual beauties of profile and complexion. Yet that which had arrested Mr. Pontifex's attention in particular was the rare strength of will and character stamped upon the pretty face. It betrayed to his critical consideration, a coolness, intelligence, and resolution seldom found in so ripe and delicate a countenance.

The American scrutinized keenly the great lawyer into whose presence he had just been shown. After a rapid survey he drew a sigh of relief.

"I'm real pleased to meet you, Mr. Pontifex," he said, placing one of the carved oak chairs for his companion, and pausing by it. "Pray forgive my hesitation. But I'd only heard you spoken of and I wanted to see what I thought of you before ——"

"Before trusting me," added Mr. Pontifex, frankly, "and now that you have made up your mind to do so, won't you sit down, Mr.—Mr. Norris?"

The solicitor had consulted rapidly the card on his blotting-pad. The name it bore was "Richard Norris."

A smile flickered round the American's lips, but he proved the correctness of Mr. Pontifex's conclusion by sinking into a lounge near the writing-table.

"Before I can explain what I wish you to do for me," said Richard Norris, "I shall have to go back a bit and tell you a sort of a story. You may have heard of me—I struck it fairly rich out at Klondyke, and the newspapers gave me no peace for a while. My name was bandied about from London to 'Frisco. That's where the trouble comes in."

He stopped and turned towards the slight figure beside him. A pitiful expression softened his grave features.

"My wife—Mr. Pontifex," he observed.

The solicitor bowed.

As she returned the salutation, the dark eyes of Mrs. Norris encountered those of Mr. Pontifex; there was a profound sadness in her gaze.

"My life has been but rough-and-tumble," said the American, "with nothing to boast of in much of it, except that it was honest."

A sudden tremor shook the young frame of the woman in the carved oak chair, she raised a gloved hand to wipe away a tear. Richard Norris sighed heavily and bent his head for a moment. When he spoke again it was in the same quiet tone.

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"Some three or four years ago," he pursued, "I was in California—at Santa Mercia—horse-breeding, with a man named Edwin Prior."

The American pronounced the last two words with a forced calmness that Mr. Pontifex noted, as he noted many things, in silence.

"I wasn't a partner," continued Richard Norris; "but manager. I had been unlucky in a fruit-growing speculation and froze on to the first chance of a living. At Santa Mercia I grew acquainted with Mab here—she was Prior's cousin, the child of an aunt that had kept house for him before she died. Mab and I fell in love, and Prior, who fancied Mab himself, soured on me. You take the situation, I guess, Mr. Pontifex."

"Oh, if you could," she cried, "you would make me a happy woman again!"

"Perfectly," said the lawyer; he was covertly studying the countenance of Mrs. Richard Norris.

"Mab warned me," admitted the American; "yet I saw no reason to quit my job till Prior should actually present me with my walking ticket. Mab was right, though; a week later I was in prison, charged by Prior with embezzling some thousand dollars. I had received the money beyond a doubt, signed a receipt, and locked the amount in a drawer against my next visit to the bank. From that drawer the money was stolen, Mab and I believe, by Prior.

"The following day he had asked for the dollars, and, as I failed to produce them, had me arrested. To everyone's amazement, on the morning I came before the judge, Mab appeared in court with the money, which she said she had found in the drawer next to that where I believed myself to have placed the dollars. I had evidently made a mistake, she remarked. Everyone but Prior was delighted, and I was discharged amid congratulations."

Richard Norris took a long breath and knitted his brows. His wife's cheeks coloured painfully. The American went on with his narrative.

"Once I was free I threatened all kinds of actions against Prior. Mab was terrified, and begged me to leave Santa Mercia instantly. When I refused she broke down and told me everything. Mr. Pontifex, the money that Mab had brought into court so opportunely was not the money that had been missed—Mab had drawn it from her cousin's bank on a cheque that she had made out herself."

Mabel Norris laid a hand on the speaker's arm, interrupting him with a tremulous gesture.

"My husband means a cheque that I had forged, Mr. Pontifex," she said bravely.

Mr. Pontifex was twisting his sapphire ring.

"The Law, Mrs. Norris," he answered thoughtfully, "prohibits forgery as it does murder, on general principles. It ignores the exceptional cases in which so-called crimes may have a moral justification. It is the task of such a man as myself to screen those cases from the sight of the Law. Believe me, the Law is very often willing to help in the process by looking the other way. But what was the precise point upon which you desired my advice?"

"I beg your pardon," rejoined his client, "naturally that is what you are waiting for. Fearing for Mab—and indeed myself—when her cousin should discover what had happened, I decided to get out of California with all speed. Going down to 'Frisco I was caught in the Klondyke boom. We travelled to the Yukon, Mab and I together—we had been married in 'Frisco—and I did uncommonly well. I am reckoned to-day to be worth three or four million dollars—I really am worth a couple. The papers wrote me up, of course, and in doing so set on our track the very man we most wanted to keep off it—Ned Prior, the holder of that cheque."

Mr. Pontifex was brooding over his sapphire—it seemed the exact tint of his blue eye. Mrs. Norris contemplated him, almost wonderingly.

"Luckily for us," proceeded the American; "Ned had tumbled to the fact that the cheque gave him a big hold over poor Mab, and, instead of applying to the criminal authorities, tried to pick up her trail. When he got on mine, through the newspapers, it was to find that I had married Mab and was a millionaire. Ned had been doing badly and was in want of funds. So he sent me an ultimatum. Unless I pay him at an early date, three million dollars—six hundred thousand pounds—in first-class securities, he will have my poor Mab extradited and tried for forgery, besides reviving the old trouble about the money that disappeared from my drawer."

"£600,000," repeated Mr. Pontifex slowly, "and you are worth at most, you say, £400,000?"

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"Two million dollars in American currency," said Richard Norris, "and not that, to realise. Now, Mr. Pontifex, as I'm not fool enough to write about such an affair as this, and I daren't see Ned myself lest I should be tempted to drill a hole in him, I should be glad if you would be my messenger. He can have £250,000 within a month, and in exchange for the cheque which Mabel drew. It will cost me the balance of my fortune to collect that amount in gilt-edged scrip. But if he will take it and give you the cheque, I will start at the bottom of the ladder again with a light heart."

Mr. Pontifex abandoned his indolent attitude and his ring-twisting to lean an elbow upon his writing-table.

"Mr. Norris," he replied deliberately, "you shall not regret consulting me in this matter. I will see this preposterous blackmailer, not, with your permission, to offer him any such terms, but to deal with him, I suspect, even more efficaciously. This I believe I *can* undertake, that you shall have the cheque without publicity and without beggering yourself."

Mabel Norris sprang up.

"Oh, if you could," she cried, "you would make me a happy woman again, and Dick need not ruin himself."

The American interposed, affectionately but determinedly.

"Mab," he said, "I thought we had done with that foolishness. Mr. Pontifex, you have my full consent to make the best bargain you can. But don't try to bluff Ned; he's a smart man, and carries a gun—that is to say, a revolver. He's a dead shot, and easily riled—you'll excuse my mentioning the fact, but you may not be used to such cattle as Ned in this law-abiding island of yours."

Mr. Pontifex fell into a momentary reverie. He roused himself from it to ask abruptly:

"What species of revolver does this rascal Prior affect? An American type, I suppose?"

Richard Norris thrust his hand into a hip-pocket and produced a compact yet formidable weapon.

"The fellow to that," he said, "or did when I knew him; it is a nice gun and one that you can get fond of."

The lawyer took the revolver and examined it. Unexpectedly he opened the breech and began to pull out the cartridges, which he thrust towards the millionaire.

"I will borrow this," he remarked; "I shall not need the ammunition."

The American stared at him—Mr. Pontifex rose.

"I am a man of impromtu ideas," he said; "where can I drop across your friend Prior? Write it down for me."

Richard Norris moved to the solicitor's seat and did as he was requested.

Mr. Pontifex stepped to the side of his client's wife.

"I can see you to be a woman of character and courage," he murmured; "will you confide yourself to me, alone, for a little time. We may be able together to scotch this relative of yours?"

Mabel Norris looked up searchingly.

"I will do anything you tell me," she responded in a shy fashion. But Mr. Pontifex saw that she meant what she said.

Her husband had finished the memorandum he was

Mabel Norris fell heavily to the floor.

engaged upon. The address was that of a house in a low street in Pimlico.

"Thank you," commented the lawyer, reading it, "and now, Mr. Norris, I want you to allow your wife to accompany me—unattended—to this place." He flipped the piece of paper on which Richard Norris had written the direction.

The American frowned undecidedly, but Mabel Norris stole close to him.

"Let us trust Mr. Pontifex, dearest," she whispered. "He is a great English lawyer, and can wish us no possible harm. Somehow, I feel a strange faith in him."

Richard Norris straightened himself proudly.

"Mr. Pontifex," he said, "you shall have your way. But if Mabel respects my desire she will not lower herself by any appeals for mercy."

The lawyer received the information without comment.

"Very well," he answered; "I shall hope to restore Mrs. Norris before the expiration of many hours—I will myself escort her to your hotel. Forgive me, if for the present, I ask you to say *au revoir*."

He rang the bell and ordered the clerk to get a cab.

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Donning his glossiest "silk," Mr. Pontifex led the American and his wife into St. James' Street. He assisted Mrs. Norris into the hansom, and, with a hasty farewell to her husband, followed her. The American regarded amazedly the retreating vehicle; Mr. Pontifex's rapidity had left him breathless.

Mr. Pontifex threw up the cap, and told the driver to make a call in Bond Street—at the establishment of an expert firm of gunsmiths. Reaching that stage of their journey, he descended, passed into the shop, and was absent for ten minutes. When he returned and they were on the route to Victoria, he showed his fair neighbour the revolver he had borrowed from Richard Norris. It was now apparently loaded.

"These, Mrs. Norris," he explained cheerfully, "are blank cartridges, and incapable of doing much harm to anybody. If by chance you should hear some shots fired this afternoon, it will be from these cartridges, and you need not be in the smallest degree alarmed. By-the-bye, can you act?"

"I think so," responded Mabel Norris, extremely interested. "Most women, they say, are actresses by instinct."

"It is probable," said the solicitor drily. "I feel sure you are one. All that I wish you to do is to faint—or pretend to faint—at a particular juncture. At that juncture I shall say, 'You once loved her—do you not see that she is ill with terror?' As I speak the word 'terror,' count five quickly and then—faint. You comprehend?"

"Quite," said his pupil; "and how long must I be—unconscious?"

"Let me see," muttered Mr. Pontifex. "Yes, until I observe 'It is nothing serious.' Then recover artistically; and whatever happens after that, keep cool."

He commenced to gossip of indifferent subjects—the weather, the thoroughfares, the people in them. Mabel Norris marvelled at the lawyer's command over his nerves.

Near a shabby lodging-house in Pimlico the cab halted. Mr. Pontifex dismissed it, rang, and demanded to see "Mr. Prior—on business." The two were ushered upstairs and into a dingy parlour, clouded with tobacco smoke, where sat, in shirt-sleeves and slippers, a typical Yankee, puffing at a fat cigar.

"What do you mean by business?" he snarled, "I haven't the pleasure of knowing you from Adam—Jehoshaphat!" he broke off, "it's Mabel."

He leapt to his feet and would have advanced, but the lawyer stepped in front of his charge.

"I am here," said Mr. Pontifex, "representing my client Mr. Richard Norris—you will guess upon what errand."

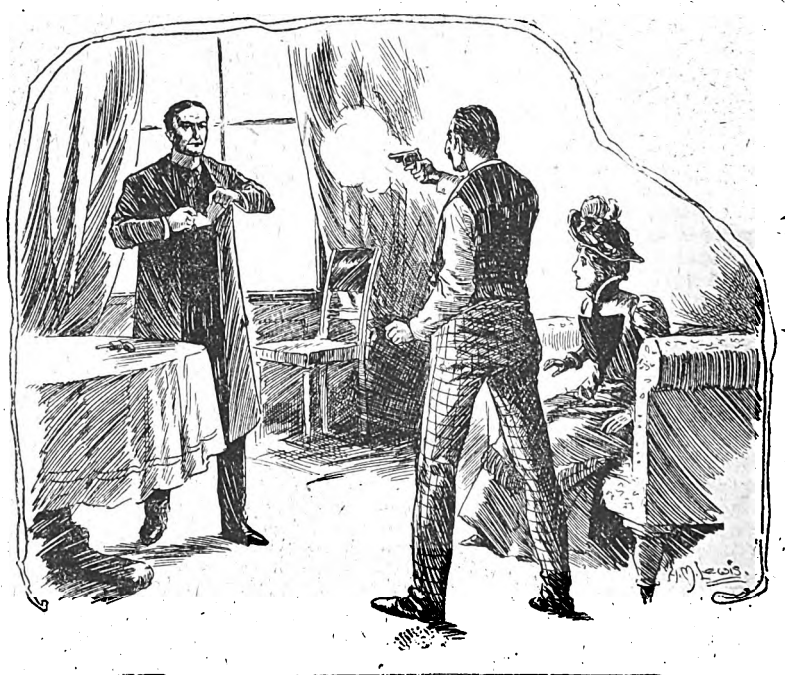
He handed his companion to a sofa, and himself sat down by a large round table in the middle of the apartment, motioning their host to the chair he had been occupying. It stood on the further side of the table. Edwin Prior dropped into it sulkily.

Mr. Pontifex coughed, as if embarrassed.

"Previous to raising the object of my mission, Mr. Prior," he stammered, with assumed uneasiness, "I may inform you that I am aware of your American practice of going armed, and realise that you are not a man likely to respect our British prejudice against pistol-shooting. I have therefore taken the precaution of not visiting you weaponless myself."

He was counterfeiting admirably the faltering, conventional air of a respectable solicitor in an awkward position. But Edwin Prior beheld the barrel of a revolver peeping at him over the edge of the round table, and laughed outright. "Calm yourself, my nervous man at law;" he said, "this isn't a question of pistols, but of diplomacy."

"Then," begged Mr. Pontifex, still with his affectation of shrewd simplicity, "do you mind placing your weapon before you, where I can see it? I will do the same with mine."



He pulled the trigger and a shot rang out.

Edwin Prior shook with merriment, but he drew out a revolver and laid it by him. The lawyer scanned it eagerly—it was the facsimile of that which he was so artfully screening with his coat-sleeve as he bent across the round table to commence the game for which he had been preparing.

"Now, sir," he said impressively; "I will come to my client's message. I am empowered to guarantee you the whole of his fortune, less the cost of realising it, in purchase of a certain cheque which you have in your possession."

"And what may Dick Norris, on his own confession, be worth?" inquired the other mockingly.

"In gross, four hundred thousand pounds," said the

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lawyer; "on a forced realisation not more than three hundred thousand."

"Three hundred thousand cents!" scoffed Edwin Prior; "why, he is known to have three or four million dollars, at any rate, over seven hundred thousand pounds. My price is six hundred thousand pounds in tip-top securities properly assigned, and if I don't get it I'll treat the States to a sensation forgery trial."

"Man, have you no compassion?" said the solicitor sternly; "can you not understand that Mrs. Norris, the reason for whose generous crime you know only too well, is here to plead for mercy. You once loved her—do you not see that she is ill with terror?"

There was a long and shuddering sigh, and Mabel Norris, who had started up convulsively, fell heavily to the floor. Prior rose hurriedly and stooped over her—there was a curious alarm in his mean face. Mr. Pontifex comprehended his thought. If Mabel Norris were dead the chief part of his hold on her husband would be gone. Edwin Prior knelt down, anxiously gazing at the pale features.

"Support her while I send for some brandy," desired the lawyer, and went to the bell. In that movement he found time—unnoticed—to change the revolvers. As he did not do more than imitate the operation of sounding the bell, no response was made.

"There, there," he said briskly, rejoining the pretended invalid; "it is nothing serious, Mr. Prior, a simple fainting fit, I am sure."

The amateur actress accepted the hint and recovered forthwith. The relieved blackmailer aided the lawyer to lift her upon the sofa.

"After all, Mab," he mumbled, "I don't want to be hard on you. I'll take three hundred thousand, if this attorney of yours will hurry up with the settlement. I can't say better than that, can I?"

Mr. Pontifex returned to his seat at the table.

"One thing further, Mr. Norris;" he said, "I wish to be satisfied that this cheque of yours is the real article in dispute, and not some worthless substitute which will allow you to harass us again with the threatened production of the original."

Edwin Prior hauled out a bulky letter-case, and fished up a soiled slip of paper with a ragged edge. Mr. Pontifex extended his hand.

"Not much!" laughed the blackmailer. The lawyer shook his head. "I must be permitted to inspect it thoroughly," he said; "you can cover me if you choose with that pop-gun of yours."

Edwin Prior did so and surrendered the cheque.

"Is this the genuine thing, Mrs. Norris?" queried Mr. Pontifex. The pretty Californian went to his side, with simulated unsteadiness, and, blushing deeply, identified the cheque, which, three years since, she had so romantically forged. The solicitor waited till she had gone back to the sofa and then, grasping the cheque very conspicuously between his thumbs and fingers, tore it—one, twice, thrice.

A spasm of anger distorted the blackmailer's countenance—he pulled the trigger of the weapon he was levelling and a shot rang out, another and another succeeded, yet, to the marksman's utter consternation, Mr. Pontifex was able smilingly to complete the destruction of the cheque. Having reduced it to fragments he put them in his mouth and swallowed them. But before that process was concluded Edwin Prior found himself looking into the muzzle of his own revolver which Mr. Pontifex wielded scientifically while he explained the apparent miracle that had occurred.

"Pray waste no more of my blank cartridges, Mr. Prior," he said blandly, "especially as I hear footsteps on the stairs. If you keep your countenance and leave unchallenged the trifling fibs your shots will compel me to invent, I will promise that you shall not be the poorer for your discretion."

The door was flung open as Mr. Pontifex slipped the loaded revolver into his pocket and turned to apologise to the excited landlady.

"My friend was exhibiting a favourite pistol," he said soothingly, "when it dropped to the floor, and, being loaded, the shock discharged several of the chambers. That is so, is it not, Mr. Prior?" And his singular eyes met those of the blackmailer so significantly that Edwin faltered "Yes."

* * * * *

Richard Norris retained his fortune and his wife her good name. As for Edwin Prior, he received back the amount of his forged cheque with compound interest and a munificent bonus, which generosity so touched him that he admitted his plot to convict Richard Norris of embezzlement at Santa Mercia. It was he who had abstracted the money from the latter's drawer, with the object of condemning his manager to a stiff term of imprisonment.

Mr. Pontifex's superb digestion was even equal to a three-years-old cheque. But the admiring American insisted upon his taking a special fee for the performance, suggesting that it be entered up as "Perpetual Rent of Safe Deposit." And one of the great lawyer's few holidays was that in which he toured the States in luxury, the honoured guest of Mr. and Mrs. Norris.

A STRANGE MEETING.

It is not often that a well-known novelist will admit that a story that has been read and talked about in every part of the globe was moulded by him from a real personage, and on the other hand, it is a very rare occurrence for this personage to allow himself to be immortalised by a novel and yet remain good friends with the author. Such is the case, however, with Mr. Cutcliffe Hyne and Captain Kettle. The distinguished author and the prototype of the world-famous book recently met at Newcastle-upon-Tyne and conversed in the friendliest terms. They had not seen each other for a number of years.

It is interesting in connection with the above fact to note that Messrs. Pearson have just published a splendid sixpenny edition of **"The Adventures of Captain Kettle."** It is bound in a stout and attractive yellow paper cover and is turned out in style equal to a three and sixpenny novel.

The *Daily Telegraph* recently said: "The reader of fiction who has not made the acquaintance of Mr. Hyne's fascinating sea captain, is to be pitied," and there is, now, absolutely no reason why every man, woman or child should not possess a copy of this wonderful novel, as it is now issued at a sum within the reach of all and is to be obtained at every bookstall, bookseller, stationer or newsagent in the United Kingdom. Failing these, send eightpence in stamps to the publishers, and a copy will be forwarded without delay.

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A JAPANESE LOVE STORY

"The only girl I ever loved."
—ANCIENT REMARK.

THE temple at the little village of Meguro, outside the town of Yedo, is celebrated as being the last scene of a highly instructive and sentimental story. The name of Meguro means "black eyes," but whether it obtained that appellation from the pugilistic habits of its people or not, I am unable to say. As France has her grave of Abelard and Heloise for young people suffering from hopeless attachments, as England has her ballad of the forsaken maid of Woodstock town, and Scotland its "Auld Robin Gray," so Japan has its magic love story of Kamarasaki and Gompachi.

On my visit to the place, I was accompanied by a gay young Japanese, in the employment of the British Minister, who spoke most excellent English, and during the drive he told me how that this was how it all happened.

In the old days, when Japan was Japan, three hundred years before the obtrusive foreign devil had come, buying up all the old Cloisonné, and making bad railways and building inferior steamboats for the government at extortionate rates; when gentlemen wore two swords sticking out of their belts, and the Mikado was a man often heard of, but seldom seen, there lived in an inland town a young man called Gompachi. He was a fine-grown young man, who had done credit to his seven or eight bowlfuls of rice and high fish per diem; and except a slight partiality for saki and knocking in late at nights, up to the time when the story commences, his parents must have had every reason to be proud of him. But even as Rob the Grinder met with his fate through his fondness for singing birds, so were dogs the rocks on which Gompachi's bark was destined to come to grief.

Dogs of all kinds he loved, but of fighting dogs it was that he considered himself especially a connoisseur. Where he found them in Japan I can't imagine, for a more pusillanimous lot, more addicted to vanishing round corners as you approach, and valiantly barking from the tops of roofs and other similar points of vantage as you retire, it would be impossible to find out of Egypt.

However, he either bred, or found, or, what is more likely, stole a dog which was able and willing to tackle any canine brother to whom he might be opposed; and Gompachi, from that time forward, began to wear coats of a noisy pattern and "obies" of a preposterous length; and other young men and their dogs got up and slid when he and his tyke were abroad; and he accumulated, by backing his animal, as many brass tempos as would fill a portmanteau, a collection amounting in value to two dollars, or, if brass happened to be up, two dollars and a half.

But one day, another well-grown young man came into the town, and was willing to make a match of it; and on the appointed day came Gompachi to the ground, leading his champion, and swaggering and rattling the tempos in his pocket, and offering odds on his favourite, as was his wont to do. His opponent was also of a speculative turn of mind, and so the bets were made and the fight commenced.

The battle was so equal and sanguinary that at length both dogs lay dead upon the ground; but before giving his final kick, very much to the appreciation of all the cats in the neighbourhood, Gompachi's dog had chawed off more than an inch of his opponent's tail, and on this ground his master claimed both the victory and the bets.

The new-comer, who, if he had lived, might evidently have become a Japanese Gladstone—refused to pay, but declared himself willing to refer the matter to arbitration, and even hinted that two other courses were open for settling the dispute.

Gompachi, however, would have none of it.

"Stump up, or I shall make you," was all he said.

"Make your mongrel disgorge that inch and a half of my dog's tail!" said the other.

Words like these in Japan can only have one ending. It was out swords and cut three times, before you could say "knife." Gompachi was one too many for the stranger upon the ground.

Then Gompachi wiped his reeking sword upon the paper handkerchief of his opponent, and took from his pocket all the small change he could find; after which he said he felt rather delicate in the chest, and

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thought a little sea-air and change would be about the best thing for him.

And though for months afterwards the police kept asserting that they had received "important information" as to his whereabouts, they always failed to produce his person to the authorities.

Gompachi walked away among the hills, till at last he met with some gentlemen who earned their living by sleight-of-hand tricks on the Mikado's highways; and as he began to have cravings for two or three of his usual wash-ba infuls of rice, he gladly accepted their invitation to spend the night in their country house, which at that time consisted of a vast inaccessible cave; and thus, having finished his imitation of Rob the Grinder, he commenced a career on the model of that immoral young Spanish gentleman, Gil Blas.

The robbers had, of course, heard his tempos rattling in his pocket, and had noticed with envious eyes the silver hilt of the sword which had cut short the possibly political career of his late antagonist. But, as I have before said, he was a well-grown young man, and they thought they might as well put off the charitable task of relieving him of these articles until such time as he should be sound asleep. So they brought out the rice and the fish and the usual impossible pickles and saki, and spent a pleasant convivial evening with a slight tendency to feel muddled, till Gompachi arose, yawning mightily, and announcing his intention of placing his neck on the wooden dumb-bell which serves these people for a pillow, he went to sleep.

He was awakened in the middle of the night, not by a pain in his neck or elsewhere, but by the apparition of a beautiful young girl of fifteen summers. Writers of novels and love-tales always say "summers." Gompachi noticed, when the saki was out of his eyes, that she had a pair of the sparklingest black ones he had ever seen peeping over a fashionable fan; a profusion of long, dark hair, the neatest little sandals in the world, and a pannier as big as a haystack.

He began to hope that his queue was sticking properly forward down the middle of his head like a sign post, as the queues of Japanese exquisites should always do; and while thus thinking, a voice like rippling water told him of his danger.

"And if you please," she said, "they're sharpening their swords in the back cave at this moment, sir; and if you're not a bigger fool than you look, you'll get out of this place a great deal quicker than ever you came in, without so much as waiting to say, 'Woki-hi arrigato-ki-si-on-ara,'" which is, being interpreted, "Much obliged to you for your information, and good-night, my dear!"

But then, with want of consistency which makes her sex the ducks they are—except when arguing—she proceeded to inform him that she herself was the daughter of a wealthy old gentleman in Kigoto, who had made his money in the city, and that a few days before, when out for a moonlight ramble, she had been stolen by these robbers, who were making her cook and do for them all kinds of horrid work, which was spoiling her hands, and her figure ever so much, and made her miserable, let alone there not being a bit of polished metal in the place to do her hair by.

I will say this much for Gompachi, that he was not the kind of fellow to go sneaking off and leave her to her fate, and his next intention was the only good one I can record of him.

He whipped out his sword and posted himself outside the door, thereby ending his *rôle* of Gil Blas, and adopting that of Mr. R. Swiveller, when he aroused the singer lodger of Bevis Marks. And as the first robber put his head in, he was down upon it like a guillotine, and repeated himself like a recurring decimal as each successive robber came to look after his comrades, until he had polished off the entire dozen.

Then, possessing himself of such portable articles as took his fancy, he made the best of his way to Kigoto with the black-eyed moosmie, whose name I need scarcely inform my intelligent readers was Kamarasaki Kigotean. Belgravia made great rejoicings at the return of the missing damsel, though Mrs. Grundy, of course, had something to say about it, with unpleasant allusions to wonderful coincidences, the marines, and so on.

But her old father, who had made his fortune in Korean loans, and by floating companies for the opening of mines and other useful purposes, came out liberally, and offered Gompachi five hundred golden yen, and, what should have been of far greater value to him, the hand of the lovely Kamarasaki herself, who was now madly in love with her preserver.

Gompachi had not the slightest objection to the five hundred yen, but as to the matrimonial side of the business he was not so clear. He was not indifferent to the lady's charms, but at any rate he thought he would like to have a look round the town of Yedo before his

Before he knew where he was, the whitest arms in all Japan were round his neck.

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wings were clipped. I must fear that his mind was running on fighting dogs and book-making and loud suits.

He therefore dissembled, as villains in love stories invariably do, and said that he would be glad to avail himself of the happiness in store for him, but that first it would be necessary for him to go to Yedo to transact some highly important business.

Her father, being a business man, rather liked this, and thought it augured well for the future. So Gompachi bade adieu to the sweet little Kamarasaki (the brute!) and told her in a false, flirting, kernoodling kind of way not to forget him, and that when the calls of the great commercial world ceased to press upon his anxious mind, he would return and make her Mrs. Gompachi, and never dine at his club, or have bachelor friends to dinner, or smoke in the dining room.

Then he left for Yedo with a gay heart and a large umbrella, thinking how much prettier gold yen rattle in your pocket, as you walk, than brass tempos; and the poor little girl remained behind, to pour salt tears from those br ght eyes into the gold fish-pond in the back yard, and hold private rehearsals of imaginary conversations she would have with him when he returned, to no better audience than the sacred old family tortoise.

Gompachi was not destined to reach Yedo without further adventures. That habit of his of always rattling money in his pocket was, to say the least of it, vulgar; and it would be much better if the old city gent had given him a crossed cheque payable to order, and, best of all, if he had kept it for himself or his daughter.

Gompachi was still a few miles from the town when it was getting dusk one day; and though the drowsy tinkling of his gold yen might have lulled the distant folds had there been any—there are no sheep in Japan—it had a very different effect upon six highwaymen, who were looking out for work, and fell upon him tooth and nail. Gompachi, it has been, I think, conclusively proved, was no coward, and he had the heads of three of them on the ground in a twinkling; but the remainder pressed on him hard and had almost overpowered him, when the arrival of an eighth person on the scene caused them to regard flight as an eligible move.

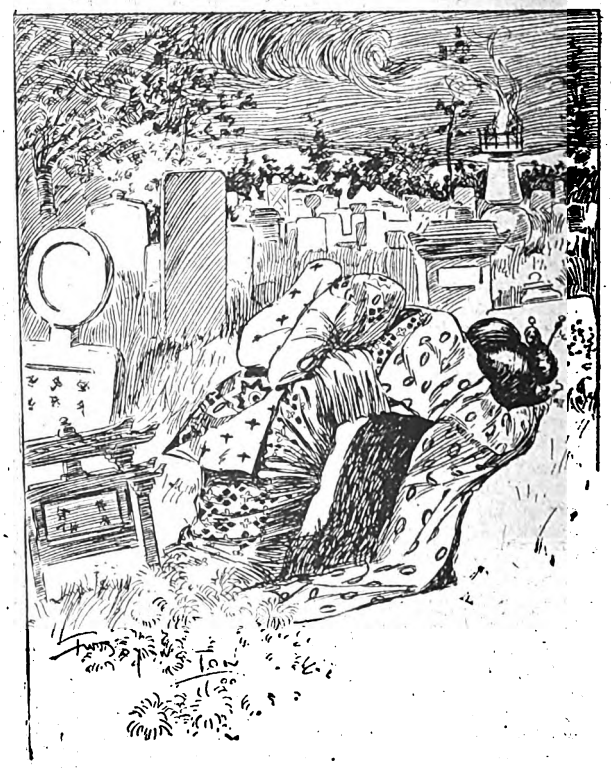
His rescuer turned out to be possessed of the name of Chobei, a wardsman of Yedo; that is to say, he was not of the Samurai, or military class, who were composed of swashbucklers like our hero, but he was an honest burgher, taking part in city affairs, such as sewers and water, and was altogether a stout, simple-hearted, honest old fellow, with more good nature than sense about him, as the sequel will fully show.

Chobei took Gompachi home with him to Yedo, and was so charmed with his manners and conversation that he begged he would continue his guest as long as he should remain in the city.

Gompachi now commenced the diligent prosecution of the important business which had so unavoidably brought him to Yedo. He went in for a regular new fit-out of the old kind of suits—large stripes and squares, with a green dragon across the chest and a pack of hounds down his back. He also bought himself several pairs of lacquered clogs, together with red umbrellas, and "obies" of an even more preposterous length than of yore.

I make no doubt that he would set up a private "juirikisha," had that very handy vehicle been invented at this epoch; as it was, he was obliged to be contented with a gorgeous "norima" or sedan-chair, like a meat-safe, which soon became well known at all the local race meetings, matches, and dog-fights; and youths in Yedo of a sporting turn began to know that they could always get the market odds from Gompachi, and that he was generally good for a quart of sakki, and any number of shovelfuls of rice, if they had the good luck to meet him after ten o'clock p.m.

How the respectable old Chobei could have stood this way of going on I can't imagine; but he appears to have endured it without a murmur, like a regular old Eli.



She flung herself on her face with a bitter cry.

His whole conduct shows his to have been a soft-hearted old fool, and he swallowed all this, and a good deal more at the back, like a boa-constrictor; for Gompachi was always knocking-in late, and must have been heard nightly by Chobei offering inarticulate invitations to the police to assist him in putting his latch-key to any practical use, and was found deep in stertorous slumbers at six in the morning in his dirty clogs upon the nice clean matting, which is the very depth of bad manners in Japan.

He was also a regular attendant at the theatres, and was to be found in the green rooms, chucking the actresses under the chin, and calling them by their Christian, or rather their Pagan, names, and accompanying them home to the Yoshiwara after the opera was over and standing suppers regardless of expense.

About this time it was rumoured among the fashionable Yedoeans that a most lovely and accomplished actress had come to the Yoshiwara, and would act the following week at the Yedoean Covent Garden of the

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period, it being positively her first appearance upon any stage.

And numerous bets having been given and taken as to the colour of her eyes and hair, Gompachi, who, you may have observed, never allowed shyness to stand in the way of business or pleasure, thought he would look round on the sly and see her previous to taking a few bets on the subject; and accordingly he called one afternoon and sent up his card, a flimsy piece of paper the size of a handkerchief, with his name printed in the centre, like the wards of a beer-cellar key.

As he stood near the door, with his red umbrella in full bloom to shelter him from a possible dose of cold water which he fully expected would be sent him as a present from the top-story window, he was, greatly to his surprise, immediately admitted, and before he knew where he was, the whitest arms in all Japan were round his neck, the prettiest face was buried in his bosom, and the brightest blackest eyes in the world were pouring salt tears of joy all over the green dragon and loud stripes that decorated his manly chest.

Need I explain that the owner of all these was none other than the foolish, daring, little, loving, peerless Kamarasaki? Yes, she it was who now sat with her small, white hand in the great, splodgy paw of this vulgar unfaithful brute, who had never so much as given a thought for months and months to the pearl which had been placed so gratuitously beneath his feet. Little by little her story came out.

She had nearly filled up the gold-fish pond with her tears, and had talked the sacred old family tortoise into his grave a thousand years or so before his time. Then she had noticed a change steal over the temper of her father. From being an easy-going, pleasant, old papa he had become each week more scruffy and aggravating, till one day he came home early, and sending his best clogs crashing through the paper window, he had calmly announced that the little game in the city was all up.

The Corean loan had been repudiated, and he had held on too long in the bubble companies, and was hoist with his own petard. To extricate himself from these difficulties, he had imported a cargo of Chinese nutmegs, which unfortunately for him had all turned out to be wooden ones.

In a word, he was completely ruined, and could not pay three tempos in the yen; and at last things turned out so bad that his daughter, little Kamarasaki, had been obliged to come to Yedo and take a theatrical engagement to keep the family from starvation.

Gompachi, being one of those plausible fellows who could have talked the pigtail off a Chinaman, soon made it all square with poor little Kamarasaki, who had finished by mildly reproaching him, as well she might, for his cruelty and neglect. Whether any money was ever remitted to the old city gent, I am unable to say, but if so, I much fear it came out of the pockets of the little moosmie.

Gompachi swore all kinds of perjuries; and she, poor thing, got quite bewildered with the gaiety of town life to which he introduced her.

As the obi and lacquered-clog makers began to call pretty often in the mornings about this time, leaving souvenirs of their visits in the shape of summonses, it became clear that money must be had from somewhere.

Old Chobei had been squeezed quite dry, and as it never at any period of his life appears to have entered into the brain of this young man to work, Gompachi now commenced his last and most celebrated impersonation of well known characters, and this time chose Mr. Turpin as his model.

He took long, solitary walks in the country, and knocked on the head corpulent old farmers returning from market, living faster and more furiously than ever; and Kamarasaki in her innocence thought it was all right, and that the money was the fruit of legitimate business. But, to draw my story to a close, this kind of thing could not last for ever. The tenth farmer proved too much for Gompachi, and being handed over to the authorities he shortly found himself where he ought to have been long before, viz., on the execution ground above the temple of Asakusa; and soon after his head and body, in two separate pieces, adorned the highest gibbet in that place of skulls.

The soft-hearted old Chobei, instead of saying that he had long foreseen it, and that it served him right, went, like an old imbecile, and bribed the Japanese authorities—with the same ease with which, if alive, he could bribe them in the present day—to let him have the body of this "victim to circumstances"—a proceeding which all people with the odour of exclusive sanctity very strong will, no doubt, deeply deplore.

He laid the body in a grave which he dug with his own hands in the sacred ground of the shrine of Meguro, and went back sorrowing to his municipal duties and clean mats; and the tragic tale of this well-grown, immoral, young snob was soon noised abroad throughout the city, till at last it reached the ear of Kamarasaki.

Then she, poor child, arose and said never a word, but she went tripping along on her little clogs from out the gaudy Yoshiwara, and pattered away along the stone flags which lead to the temple of Asakusa, where the sacred pigeons dwell among the high eaves, and lame men offer sandals to the gods; and far beyond, she climbed the hill and crept along under the shadows of the cryptomerias that flank the path, thinking of the robbers' cave where he fought for her so well, and the happy days spent with him in her father's house, and of the loving words and kisses with which he had stolen her heart and made her life so happy; and never letting one thought cross her despairing breast of his neglect or his egregious snobbishness, or his abominable crimes, till she reached the place where her heart lay buried.

And when she got to the grave she flung herself on her face with a bitter cry, and drew the dagger which all Japanese girls keep beneath their obies, and know so well how to use; and then, kissing the new piled sods, she plunged the dagger into her breast, and the bright black eyes grew dim and glassy in death.

Then old Chobei turned up again, like an amiable undertaker, and laid them side by side, and above them he put a large stone, which remains to this day, to mark their resting place.

And all the young men of Yedo ever since who have sweethearts, and who have found that the settlements are all right, and there is no fear of the money reverting back to the family in case of their wives dying without issue, make their vows here, and plight their troth, and write beautiful couplets like those you find in Tom Smith's crackers, and twist the long strips of paper on which they are written among the branches which overshadow the tomb.

And so, lighting a comtemplative pipe, I returned to Yedo with, I am not ashamed to say, a kind thought in my heart for the memory of the faithful, soft-hearted old Chobei.

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THE LION'S WARS

Our Wars With Ashanti. 1806. 1824-6. 1863-4.

ALTHOUGH the extension of the British Empire has not been accomplished without the shedding of much blood, and the squandering of much treasure, so little was known a few years ago of many of the outlying dependencies that, when we went to war with Ashanti in 1873, the thirst for information and the demand for maps could not have been greater had Ashanti been a newly-discovered country, instead of one we had had dealings with for fifty years. The Ashantis are among the worst of the savage races of Africa, and their history is stained with every imaginable crime.

Ashanti is situated in Western Africa, a little to the north of the Gold Coast, from which it is separated by an extensive country, peopled by a great variety of races. For several years before the war of 1873 broke out, the attitude of the Ashantis towards the white man had been anything but friendly, especially in the matter of encroachments in those districts of West Africa under our protection. To such lengths did these proceed, that at last we were compelled in self-defence to undertake their punishment.

Hostilities were not entered into with a light heart, for in previous wars the Ashantis had twice beaten us. Not because they were better fighters than ourselves, but because in Ashanti our soldiers had, in addition to their black foes, to fight the climate as well.

1806 was the year in which we made the acquaintance of these warlike people. One of the vassals of the king of Ashanti, a chieftain rejoicing in the name of Quacoe, had rifled the grave of a rich man for the sake of the gold ornaments buried with him. The case was laid before the British Governor, we being the suzerain power, and judgment was given against the thief.

As the sacrilegious one refused to pay the award, the chief in whose territory the despoiled grave was situated attacked the town in which the offender lived, and routed the army sent to oppose him.

But Quacoe assembled another force, fought a battle, and won a victory. Finding amongst the booty some valuable Ashanti gold swords and a hatchet, he carried them off.

On hearing of this, the king at once declared war.

Greatly alarmed, Quacoe sought refuge with the Fantees, who, on being ordered to give him up, refused.

When the Governor of Cape Coast Castle, and Governor White of the fort in the Annamaboes country, were informed that the rebel and his allies were supported by the Braffoes and the Annamaboes, and that the king's forces were only fifteen miles from the sea, they naturally became greatly alarmed.

Having defeated his enemies, the king of Ashanti took up his abode in an old Dutch fort.

The Governor now proposed that hostilities should cease, and that the king should return to his dominions.

But the Ashantis having obtained a foothold on the coast, a position they had long coveted, were in no mood to retire, and point blank dared Governor White to interfere.

Although the British garrison numbered only twenty-five, the Governor insisted, as a preliminary, that hostilities should cease.

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Had this functionary not devoted his whole time to trading with the natives, he would by 1806 have learnt something of the Ashanti character, and probably have shrunk from offending so warlike a people.

Fortunately the walls of his fort were high and strong enough to resist the howling black mob who, maddened with lust of blood and excess, now clamoured for white victims.

The garrison during the next twenty-four hours had to endure over thirty assaults. All of these they repulsed. When their numbers were reduced to eight they sent out a flag of truce. As the Ashantis had lost over 3,000 men they received our messenger most graciously. The terms of peace were not difficult to arrange, owing to the king having conceived the idea that as the English monarchs had beaten all his enemies, and the king of Ashanti had done the same with his, the two kings George III. and himself must greatly resemble each other.

Our second war with these people was not only more prolonged but far more disastrous than the first. We began it rashly, and carried it on with supreme contempt for our foes, till they beat us, for beat us they did, and that most thoroughly.

In January, 1824, Sir Charles McCarthy having (with a supreme disregard for all risk) decided that the Ashantis must be crushed, determined to invade their country and reduce them to submission. Placing one half of his army under the leadership of Major Chisholm, he marched at the head of the other into the interior.

His journey was anything but a promenade. The savages hung on his flank till he approached the country he purposed subduing. Suddenly his path was barred by 10,000 Ashanti braves. A desperate fight followed. So long as we kept up our fire the Ashantis remained on the opposite side of the river which separated the two forces, but as soon as it slackened they swarmed across, greatly terrifying our black allies, who fell back in a panic. Some English militia, all yokels to a man, refused to retire although ordered to do so. To these brave fellows belongs the doubtful honour of having killed the greatest number by the bayonet in any battle. It is calculated that in the charge of the Ashantis after they crossed the river every militiaman killed four.

When the charges finished, the lads from the country removed the bayonets, left their muskets on the ground and dashed into the middle of the Ashantis bringing the average up to eight.

The art and practices of warfare being of savage origin, the strategy of coloured races is frequently better than our own. When the lads from the plough, wearied of slaughter, commenced to retreat, they found, on reaching Secondee, a large force of the enemy armed with long knives planted in their path. The struggle which ensued beggars description.

The bayonet was more than a match for the knife, but the Ashantis had received such reinforcements that our position soon became desperate.

Breaking through our ranks, the progress of the foe could be followed by the headless corpses of our men.

Overwhelmed by numbers, the few survivors fled, but, being overtaken, a massacre followed in which nearly all the officers, including Sir C. McCarthy, were killed.

Two days later the numbers of the little band were reinforced by the remnant of Major Chisholm's force, which had suffered severely. Of the entire force associated with this miserably conducted expedition, only a handful survived, our losses being eighty-four natives and 168 British.

After a lull of three weeks the Ashanti forces advanced to within five miles of Cape Coast Castle. Seeing his danger, Colonel Sutherland, who was now in command, had all the houses intervening between the fort and the bush pulled down.

Grave as was the peril, the Colonial Office evinced no alarm.

In May, 1824, however, the garrison at Cape Coast Castle was increased to 316 rank and file. In July, the Ashantis, hearing that still further reinforcements were on their way from England, determined to attack us before they could arrive.

Owing to a perfectly fanatical weakness of Colonel Sutherland for dividing his forces we were unable for months to gain any advantage over the foe.

In 1826 however, we took a terrible revenge. Stationing the bulk of the native force in the centre with a few British to stiffen them, the two wings consisting of British, Dutch and Danish, the officer in command swung his men round, completely enveloping the Ashanti army. The guns were then got to work and the savages were mowed down in thousands. It was a complete victory, and ended in our capturing the Ashanti camp. To the horror of our troops, one of the trophies which fell into our hands proved to be the head of Sir Charles McCarthy. The Ashantis lost over 5,000 warriors and a number of chiefs; our losses were also heavy, 800 dead and 1,600 wounded with knives.

After this the Ashantis remained quiet till 1864. Two slaves in 1863 escaped from Ashanti to our territory and on our refusing to deliver them up the king dispatched an army for their recovery. Strange to say, the public got to hear of this war before it was over. Although strongly disapproved of, reinforcements were sent which arrived in time to enable us to drive the Ashantis back. Then a small force under Couren marched into the Ashanti country. Why they did so is not known, but they did, and having arrived there marched back again. Our losses on the return journey were enormous, and we had to bury the guns on the road to prevent their falling into the hands of the enemy.

This ended the war of 1863-4 and the Ashantis remained quiet till 1873, when, without a word of warning, they suddenly invaded the territory of the Assim tribe. The chiefs applied to us for assistance; but although the Colonial Office must have known that to refuse our protection would be interpreted by the savages as a sign of weakness, we gave them to understand that we should only defend ourselves.

This greatly elated the Ashantis. We, the strong white man who just before had taken over the territory of the Elmini from the Dutch now declared that the native tribes must not look to Great Britain for protection.

By the time the Ashanti army had reached the coast we reversed our policy and besought the natives, especially the Fantees, to fight. After much persuading the Fantees consented to be led against their old foes, and after a battle which lasted the entire day defeated them.

A week later they attacked again, but, being poorly supplied with ammunition, were presently compelled to retreat. The Ashantis pressing on, the retreat became a rout, and the Fantees, having had enough fighting, dispersed.

By February our position became so precarious that the Government hastily dispatched some troops. In the meantime the Elmini, having joined the Ashantis,

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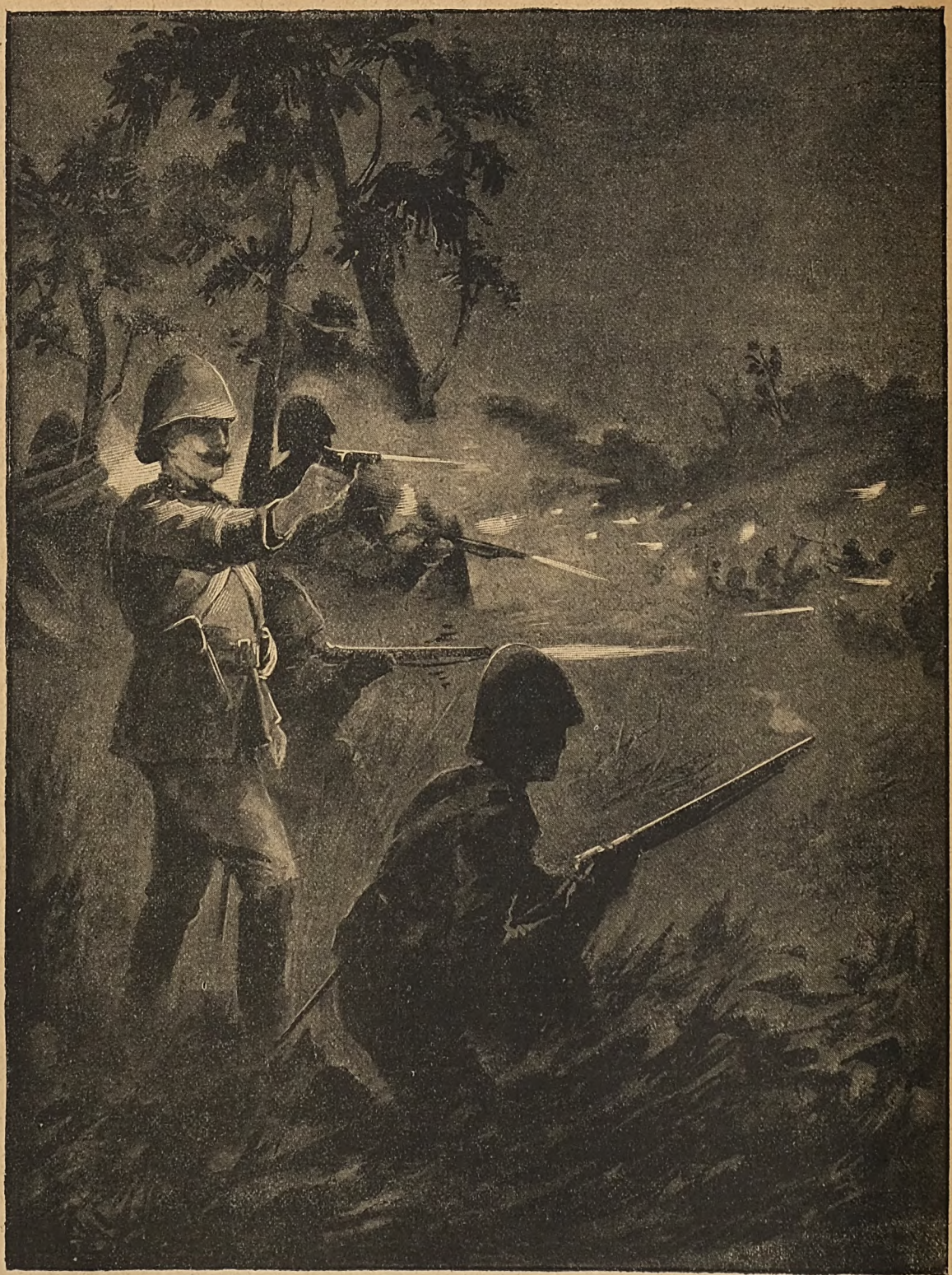

Drawn by] [In the middle of the night they attacked. [Lawson Wood.

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proceeded to raid the country round the forts. In June, however, they came into collision with some marines which had just arrived.

Although their advance was severely checked, the climate so soon thinned the ranks of our men that they boldly laid siege to Elmini fort, a formidable structure, built in 1481 by the adventurous Portuguese, from whom it was taken by the Dutch in 1657. As the fort was protected by no fewer than ninety guns, which, although old-fashioned, were powerful enough to keep the savages at bay, time was given for the dilatory authorities to send out more troops.

As soon as it was known in this country that war was inevitable there was a loud outcry. The prophecies of failure were so persistent that, had not the conduct of the expedition been confided to an officer who possessed in an unusual degree the confidence of the nation, its abandonment would have been certain.

The army which was to capture Coomassie, the capital of Ashanti, consisted of some 4,000 men, and included sailors, marines, engineers and artillery. Sir Garnet Wolseley who controlled operations, was in no hurry to commence business. The Ashantis to the number of over 40,000 were devastating the country, but as much depended on the steadiness of the native troops the expedition did not start till his black allies had been thoroughly drilled.

The preparations being at last completed, the British force plunged into the vast primeval forest and made for the Ashanti capital. Up hills, the difficulty of which was increased by dense undergrowth, down into swamps where the air was heavy with the germs of fever, across rolling plains and broad deep rivers, the troops, marching in four columns, toiled on.

The enemy commenced to dispute our advance at Borborassi. Driven out of the village and back into the bush, the savages assailed the sailors on their flank, but were quickly beaten off and chased to such a distance by the irate tars, that the army had to wait till they returned. When the march was resumed the Ashantis made another rear attack on the tars, but the number of Snider bullets which found a home in their ranks was so great that in all future encounters they kept as far from the naval brigade as possible.

Impeded by the rank luxuriance of an equatorial vegetation, the rate of progress would have been alarmingly slow but for the good work done by the engineers, who, protected by strong guards, marched in front making the roads as they went.

At Amoaful we encountered an enormous force evidently prepared to prevent, if possible, the capture of the capital. As the safety of the army depended on the coming battle, Sir Garnet neglected no precaution. He disposed his forces in four columns, Col. Evelyn Wood being in command of the one on the right, having with him Sir Garnet himself. As the Ashantis understood the art of war, the safety of the rear was handed over to Colonel Warren.

At about eight o'clock in the morning Lord Gifford's scouts came in touch with the enemy. The Highlanders at once went to the front, and the fighting soon became general. When the right came into action the Ashantis massed a heavy force and hurled it at Evelyn Wood's column with such fury, that had not Sir Garnet hurried off for the Welsh Fusiliers Wood's men must have given way.

As soon as it was certain that the rear was not threatened, Sir Garnet sent for the Rifle Brigade to drive the enemy from some dense bush, the friendly cover of which enabled them to keep up a most destructive fire. The moment the Rifles began to edge round, the savages, alarmed for their communication, stole swiftly away and joined in an attack on the left. Then for the second time there seemed a chance of our being defeated.

Towards evening, Essamanquatia, the cleverest of the Ashanti generals, suddenly appeared with a strong reinforcement, and, seeing at a glance how matters were progressing, fiercely attacked the already sorely pressed left.

Fortunately, the Rifles had seen the savages they had dislodged from the scrub making for their right, and suspecting their intention they moved swiftly across the left, coming up just in time to hurl back the new attack.

But it was the 2nd West Indians who turned the tide of battle. The wily savages, although they were driven from the field, had plenty of fight left in them. The moment they reached the bush they rushed off to Eusarpe, where we had stationed a detachment two miles away. They charged the intrenchments which the little garrison had taken the precaution to construct repeatedly till midnight, and then sullenly retired.

In the middle of the night they attacked Quarman, a small place where some of the troops had bivouacked, but something of the sort being anticipated they were repulsed with terrific loss.

This crowning disaster, coming after twenty hours' hard fighting, so discomforted them that they fled.

During the day the Ashantis had over 15,000 warriors fighting. Including the losses incurred during the night attacks the whole was reduced to 12,000.

On the following day Sir Garnet pushed on a flying column, which attacked and captured, after a stout resistance, the town of Becquah. As soon as it was destroyed the troops resumed their march on Coomassie.

The Ashantis then prepared a number of most cleverly-contrived ambuscades on our line of march, but Sir Garnet, being a general with brains, cleared them in advance.

The crossing of the river Ordah led to another fiercely-contested battle, but the determined bravery of the British soldier was not to be denied, for although the Ashantis now contested every mile of our advance we still drew nearer and nearer to our destination. Village after village, Ordahon, Eusleyan, Korsi, all were stormed, the Ashantis being beaten back, despite the encouragement afforded by their sovereign, who had now joined them; for King Coffee, though a poor warrior, was greatly beloved by his troops on account of his cruelty.

To discount the advantage of their monarch's presence, Sir Garnet left the attacking to be done by the Highlanders, who, anxious to get the business over, rushed villages and ambuscades in the most reckless manner.

On February 4th we entered Coomassie. The troops were greatly impressed by the imposing proportions of the capital.

The main street was over a mile and a half long and seventy yards wide, the city itself being over three miles and a half round.

Instead of huts we found to our astonishment houses with alcoves and stuccoed facades embellished with Mauresque patterns, the effect being heightened by painting the upper part of the house white and the lower part red.

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The Ashantis may have been savages, but at least one of their class distinctions greatly resembled our own. The servants of the nobility and gentry lived apart, the passages connecting the different offices being all lined with closets and store rooms.

"Civilised," said the soldiers after inspecting the Ashanti kitchens.

"Savages," they declared when they came on the Death Grove and noticed some forty bodies in various stages of corruption; and savages the Ashantis are.

In 1873 it was quite a common thing for 300 slaves to be killed at one time, when any calamity, such as the death of a king's sister, occurred. Considering that over 1,000 were put to death annually in Coomassie, the people must have been an exceptionally prolific lot.

The palace of King Coffee was measured by a curious Highlander, and found to be 500 feet square. One portion of the building was actually made of stone, the rest was stuccoed.

The tastes of monarchs, like those of lesser mortals differ.

Those of the monarch of Ashanti inclined towards elephants' tails, ivory horns, rusty cutlasses, and sabres, worn-out guns bound round with clips of gold, and war drums well-bespattered with blood. No opposition was offered us as we entered the city. No one molested us, the Ashanti warriors grinned pleasantly at the Highlanders and were very communicative till we asked to see their king, then they froze.

Sir Garnet sent a message by one of the chiefs saying that, now Great Britain had proved her strength, he wished to spare the town if the Ashantis would make peace at once and agree to pay a small indemnity, the amount of which should be fixed later. The chief conveyed the message but the king still remained in hiding.

When Sir Garnet learnt that Ashanti politics exclude all honest dealing, and that treaties are made to be broken, it became clear that nothing was to be gained by negotiation; so as a mark of our power and our ability to punish any future acts of aggression, and, above all, to lessen, if not destroy, the prestige of the Ashantis, the palace and city were ordered to be destroyed by fire.

A few sentimentalists in this country professed to be extremely angry over the burning of Coomassie. They were wrong, for it was a most beneficent act. The Ashanti government was atrocious, their capital was a charnel house, their religion a consummation of cruelty and treachery, their policy was even worse than their religion, and they were a terror to their feebler neighbours.

Just as the troops were about to start on their homeward march King Coffee put in an appearance. Discretion being the better part of valour he thought it would be as well to open negotiations. At Fornangah a treaty was signed by which King Coffee bound himself to pay by instalments an indemnity of 50,000 ounces of pure gold towards defraying our expenses in the war.

He also guaranteed freedom of trade between Ashanti and Great Britain. His majesty also agreed to discontinue the practice of human sacrifices.

The treaty signed the troops started on their march back. The coast was reached on February 22nd, and the soldiers at once started for England.

[*Next week:* **The New Zealand War.**]

Short Stories That . . . . Make You Laugh.

The Prize of One Guinea for the best Storyette has been won this week by Miss Annie Jackson, 5 Sutherland Street, Sheffield, for the Storyette entitled "Bringing the Whole Force."

Bringing the Whole Force.

A well-known professor at one of our universities was often annoyed by two Italians playing a street organ before his house.

Giving his servant some money, he told her that whenever she heard an organ she was to go out and pay the owners to take it away.

This was a failure. The men, instead of coming once a week, came twice.

One day, the sound of the organ disturbed the professor while working at one of his lectures.

This so annoyed him that he rushed out and ordered the men away, telling them that if they came again he would hand them over to the police.

They refused to go unless he gave them money.

Enraged at their impertinence, he raced down the street in search of a policeman. Just as he turned the corner of the street he met a sergeant marching nine constables to their beats. Without speaking, he turned and walked alongside the procession.

When they turned the corner the Italians saw the professor with the policemen. It was enough. They were both seized with a sudden desire to see how quickly they could get the organ out of the street.

The cure was lasting, for the professor declares that no one has since been bold enough to play an organ before his house.

A. J.

Those Rationals.

Scene.—An American Court of Justice.

"Which is the plaintiff in this case?"

The plaintiff: "I am the plaintiff, your honour."

The judge: "I thought the wife was the plaintiff."

The plaintiff: "I am the wife, your honour."

The judge: "The dickens you are!"

The plaintiff: "I trust your honour entertains no prejudice against the habiliments of the new woman?"

The judge: "I! certainly not, at the same time I feel it my duty to inform you that you don't stand the ghost of a show with the jury!"

The plaintiff: "Why not?"

The judge: "Because they are all married men."

Shrill voice from the jury box: "You're off judge, four of us are married women!"

A. K. R.

He Met His Match.

A certain well-known railway contractor has the reputation of looking after the minor details of his great business with a keen eye. One morning, while

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out inspecting the work that was being done on a railway, he picked up a stray bolt lying by the side of the line. Then he walked to where the men were working.

"Look here," he called out to one of the workmen, "how is it that I find bolts lying about wasted? I have to pay for these things, you know."

"Why, where did you get that, sir?"

"I found it a little way up the line here."

"Oh, did you?" cried the workman. "I'm much obliged to you, sir, for I've been hunting for that bolt all the forenoon. I knew there was one missing!"

The august contractor concluded that he could give that workman no points on economy, and left in silence.

D. P. R.

Under Ten.

A CIRCUS paid a flying visit to a small northern town not long ago, and the price of admission was sixpence, children under ten years of age half-price.

It was Edith's tenth birthday, and her brother Tom, aged thirteen, took her in the afternoon to see the show. Arrived at the door he put down ninepence, and asked for two front seats.

"How old is the little girl?" asked the money-taker doubtfully.

"Well," replied Master Tom, "this is her tenth birthday, but she was not born until later than this in the afternoon."

The money-taker accepted the statement and handed him the tickets, but it was a close shave.

E. F. C.

A Double Joke.

A SMART man slapped down a five-shilling piece upon the counter of a restaurant in the City the other day as if he were angry.

"Look here, sir," he growled, "I don't often complain of the food that's served me, but that pepper of yours is half peas."

"I beg your pardon," replied the landlord. "You must be mistaken; I buy that pepper whole and grind it myself."

"I don't care a hang about that, sir! I repeat it is half peas."

"Oh! very well, if you say so. There's no need to quarrel over the matter. Still, I'd like to see you prove it," said the landlord calmly.

"Well, sir, I prove it this way—pepper—p-e-p-p-e-r—half p's. See?"

"Oh! yes," said the other, "it's a joke. Ha, ha! That's great! Best I ever heard! Your change, sir; thank you. Ha, ha! Splendid joke."

"Oh! it isn't half bad, but you have given me sixpence short."

"I think not, sir. We charge sixpence extra for peas. Rather out of season, you know, this time of the year!"

R. C.

Good Farming.

"SAMBO, is your master a good farmer?"

"Oh, yes, massa fust-rate farmer—he makes two crops in one year."

"How is that, Sambo?"

"Why, he sells all his hay in de autumn, and makes money once; den in de spring he sell de hides of de cattle dat die for want of de hay, and makes money twice."

T. J. W.

Not Quite Clear.

A YOUNG soldier who had just joined his regiment in India, met an old chum, who had been out there some time, and asked if India was as bad as it was painted in England.

"Oh, no," said his chum, "not at all. The fact of the matter is, there's a lot of young fellows come out here that don't take proper care of themselves; they eat and they drink, and they sleep and they die, and then they write home and tell their friends it's the climate that's killed them."

A. H.

Two Reasons.

THE latest device of a Paris paper for attracting readers is the engagement of two eminent physicians to attend gratuitously upon its yearly subscribers.

Recently the manager of the paper gave notice to one of the physicians "not to prescribe for X. any more; his subscription has expired."

The doctor replied:

"So has X."

C. F.

RESULT OF THE "FITTING FACE" COMPETITION.

THE first prize of £1 1s. has been awarded to MR. DONALD ROBERTSON, of 95 Grove Street, Glasgow, whose attempt was the most accurate sent in.

A copy of the "Maori Maid" has been sent to each of the following:

R. Williamson, 56 Prince Street, Peterhead.
F. Williamson, 56 Prince Street, Peterhead.
W. Sinclair, 53 Longate, Peterhead.
D. Cooper, 10 Wallace Street, Peterhead.
Jas. Cooper, 10 Wallace Street, Peterhead.
Thos. Collinge, 170 Lodge Road, Birmingham.
A. J. King, The Barracks, Cork.
Miss Lily Smith, 24 The Mall, Clifton, Bristol.
Jas. Robertson, 95 Grove Street, Glasgow.

Here is the correct face:

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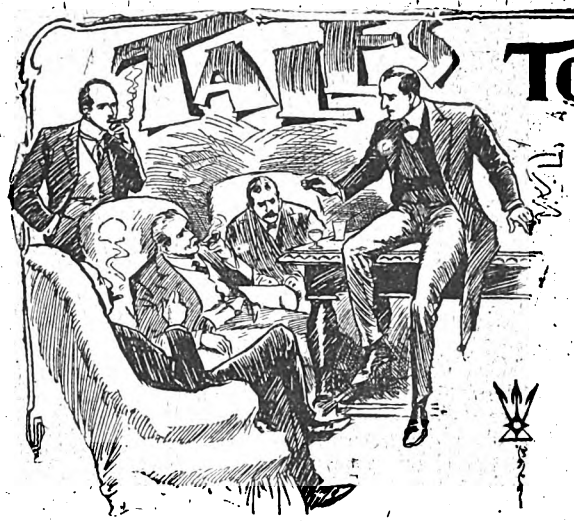

Told "off Duty."

[You probably don't know the "Stand-Easy" Club. It isn't in the directory, and you might live next door to the place for years without knowing of its existence by that name. It isn't a conventional club; there is no subscription, and there is no register of members. It is merely a room in a quiet, orderly, and select hostelry in Westminster, where, by common consent, a number of officials of all kinds meet when "off duty." There you may find detectives from Scotland Yard, near by; firemen, commissionaires, a soldier or two, and maybe a doctor from St. Thomas' Hospital or elsewhere. A motley crowd they would be if they wore their uniforms, but at the "Stand-Easy" uniforms are a rarity, "mufti" being the unwritten rule. The result is a gathering of quiet, well-behaved, and well-dressed men. Saturday night is the time when one sees the biggest muster, for then it is the custom for one member to regale the company with a story, the story being, as a rule, an account of some incident in the teller's own career.]

Sweetbriar's "National."

Told by the EX-JOCKEY.

ALTHOUGH unmistakably "horsey" in dress and appearance, there is little about old Nat Dogget to suggest that he was at one time a professional jockey. For Nat is of average height, and more than average weight, tipping the beam, as he does, at fifteen-stone odd.

Let it at once be said, however, that Nat Doggett was never a flat-race jockey. His public appearances in the saddle were strictly confined to sport "between the flags"—*i.e.*, steeplechasing; in which branch of horse-racing, of course, the burdens by the equine competitors are on an altogether higher scale than those which the fliers of the "flat" are called upon to carry. Hence, it isn't at all necessary to be a pigmy, in order to earn a lining as a professional "cross-country" rider. A man of ten stone, or thereabouts, is as well adapted for the business—rather better, in fact—than a puny mannikin who has to carry a lot of "dead weight" in his saddle-cloths. As old Doggett often declared, "Every pound o' lead tells as much on a hoss as a pound an' a half o' livin' flesh an' blood. Why, I can't profess to tell, but 'tis so."

It is many years ago since Nat relinquished the saddle and started business as a job-master in London. Nowadays his son practically runs the business for him, although Nat still persists in showing up at the "yard" for a few hours daily. Being a widower, he often spends an evening at the club, with the frequenters of which the cheery, ruddy-faced old fellow is remarkably popular.

"Did any of you ever hear the story of Sweetbriar's 'National'?" remarked Nat, when, on a recent evening, he was asked to entertain the company with a yarn. "No? Well, I ain't surprised at that; for though the race caused a bit of a sensation at the time, I don't suppose more than half-a-dozen people ever knew the real facts o' the affair.

"Sweetbriar, I may tell you, was trained by John Farrant, one o' the cleverest cross-country trainers of his day. I was a raw youngster o' fifteen when I got a job in his stable, and not till I'd had several years' hard practice, ridin' exercise, and schoolin'-gallops, was I allowed to have the leg-up in a real race. That mount was a winnin' one, and afore the end o' the season I'd quite a string o' wins to my credit.

"But though I got plenty o' mounts from other stables, I still stuck to my old master, the owners for whom he trained havin' first claim on my services. Durin' the 'off' season, I made old Farrant's place my headquarters, and rode his horses in their gallops the same as I'd done when I was only a stable lad. Farrant's wasn't a big establishment, but it was a select one; for old John was a trifle particular who he trained for, and the horses under his charge generally had a bit o' class about 'em.

"At the time I'm speakin' of, we had a bay mare called Sweetbriar, of whom great things were expected. She was a rare-bred 'un, and though she hadn't proved o' much account on the flat, looked like makin' somethin' out o' the common at the jumping game. As a five-year-old she'd won half-a-dozen little steeplechases off the r el; after which her owner, Mr. Frank Lindley, decided to put the mare aside until the next year, and then have a cut in for the Grand National with her.

"So Sweetbriar was entered, and, as the handicapper only gave her 10st. 12lb., which was rather less than we'd expected, Farrant started preparin' her for the big race. As I could do the weight comfortable, I was promised the mount. I rode the mare in her gallops, and, if at first I hadn't thought a great deal of her chance against such animals as she was to meet, I soo.. held a very different opinion. For not only could Sweetbriar go fast and stay for ever, as the sayin' is, but she jumped as clever as a cat, and I never knew her to put a foot wrong.

"Mr. Lindley, the owner, came over from his place three or four mornings a week, and well pleased he was at the way his mare was gettin' through her preparation. 'We shall win!' he said to me one morning as I was dismountin' after a three-mile spin over fences.

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'We shall win, Doggett; the mare's a certainty!' 'Bar accidents,' I replied; 'I fancy she will myself, sir.' 'Oh! she'll stand up safe enough,' says Mr. Lindley; 'I don't believe you could pull her down wi' ropes! Yes, we shall win—I'm confident we shall win!'

"Yet, in spite of his speakin' so cocksure, I couldn't help noticin' the terribly anxious look there was on his face. He was only a young man—hardly thirty—and he'd married Miss Lucy Calton, daughter of Sir Peter Calton, one o' the leadin' men in the county, though precious poor for a baronet. The girl didn't bring Frank Lindley any dowry; but he didn't mind that, he was only too glad to take her for herself alone. You see, he was pretty comfortably off, havin' succeeded to his father, old Squire Lindley's, money and estates when he came of age.

"'Twas well known at the time o' the marriage that Miss Lucy had chosen him against Sir Peter's wishes, the old baronet favourin' a certain Captain Denny, who, on retirin' from the Army, had become connected wi' a very cute racing stable, and made a pile o' money on the Turf. This chap Denny was very much 'gone' on Miss Calton, and between him and Frank Lindley there were several scenes. Once, in the huntin' field, the Captain struck the other with his crop, and the young squire had retaliated with interest. A few days after this quarrel, Lindley's engagement to Miss Lucy was announced, whereupon Captain Denny packed up his traps and left Sir Peter's house, swearin' he'd be revenged on Lindley for havin' put him out o' the runnin'. He never visited the baronet again, and you can bet he wasn't invited to the weddin', which came off a few months afterwards.

"Well, for a couple o' years Mr. Lindley and his young wife was as happy as could be. Then it got about that, through the failure of some London concern in which he was interested, the young squire had lost pretty-nigh the whole of his fortune. That there was some truth in it was proved when he sold off most of his hunters and carriage-horses, and started to cut down expenses in all manner o' ways.

"This happened just about the time when Sweetbriar was startin' her preparation for the big steeplechase. Now, Mr. Lindley had never been much of a racin' man; but, like his father afore him, he liked to have one or two horses in trainin' with John Farrant, whose stables, I ought to have mentioned before, were within easy walkin' distance of the squire's place.

Presently a hand appeared through the hole.

"It rather surprised me to find Sweetbriar's owner so keen on winnin' this race, that he should come over several times a week before breakfast just to see the mare do her mornin' gallop. But at last I got to know the reason of his anxiety. It appeared that it was his money, and his money alone, which had brought Sweetbriar from 33 to 1 to less than half the price. In them days of heavy betting, it took some money to shorten the odds to such an extent a month before the race was due to be run.

"The fact was, as I afterwards learnt, that owing to his losses in the city, which I've mentioned, Mr. Frank Lindley's financial affairs were in a very rocky condition, and unless he could get hold of a large sum by a certain date, he'd be compelled to sell off everything. So he had decided to risk his all on Sweetbriar for the 'National.' If she landed the race for him, his winnings would set him on his legs again; if she failed—well, he would be a ruined man.

"The mare continued to do first rate, and her chance was lookin' rosier than ever, when, one day, about a fortnight before the race, she drifted out in the bettin' to 25 to 1. We couldn't understand it, for only the day before she had been well-backed on behalf o' the owner and stable connections at 14's. Young Mr. Lindley at once went up to London, returnin' next day, lookin' very glum and anxious.

"'I don't like the look of it,' he said to Farrant. 'My agent tells me that several of the 'cutest bookmakers are willing to lay almost any odds against our mare, and there seems to be an unlimited laying commission out for her. What d'you make of it Farrant?'

"'I don't know what to think, sir,' answered old John. 'Sweet-briar was never better in her life than she is now, and her jockey's as straight as a die. There can be only one explanation.'

"'You mean that they intend to "get at" the mare?' asked Mr. Lindley.

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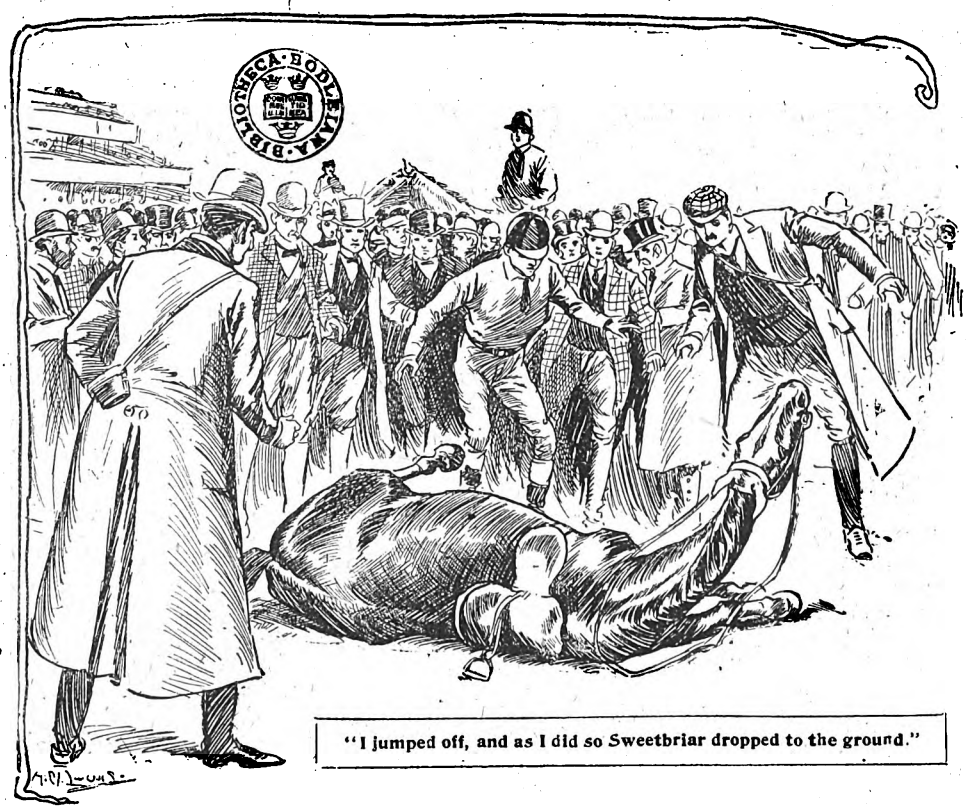
"'That's about the size of it, sir,' replied Farrant. 'But they shan't get at her; no, by Heaven, they shan't. Me and Nat here will take turns watchin' the mare night and day; and if I catch any scoundrel tryin' to come the nobblin' game, I'll thrash him first, and drag him through the horse-pond afterwards! Never you fear, Mr. Lindley; Sweetbriar shall go the post as fit as hands can make her, and if she don't win the Grand National, it'll be simply because she ain't good enough for the job!'

"Well, late on the very next night, while Farrant was keepin' guard over Sweetbriar in her box, he heard a noise as of somebody boring a hole through the stable wall, just above the mare's manger. Presently a hand appeared through the hole, and into the manger was dropped a bolus, about three times the size of a pea.



"I jumped off, and as I did so Sweetbriar dropped to the ground."

Old John instantly pocketed this pill, and then slipped out o' the stable, horse-whip in hand. But he was too late—the would-be nobbler had vamoosed, and though search was made for him till long past midnight, the scoundrel couldn't be found.

"After that we kept stricter watch than ever; but no more attempts were made to dose Sweetbriar, and, two days before the great race, Farrant and me took the mare to Liverpool. She was in grand fettle, and the style in which she did her winding-up gallop over part o' the course, pleased everybody who saw it. Yet she travelled worse than ever in the market, and, when the numbers went up, shouts of '25 to 1 Sweetbriar' came from all parts o' the ring.

"I cantered the mare down to the startin'-post, and when the flag fell jumped her off at a fair pace, so as to avoid the crowdin' which always takes place at the first obstacle. Sweetbriar was over it a length in front of anything else, and we were leadin' at the second fence also; but, between that and the next jump, a lightly-weighted old horse, called The Mandarin, took up the runnin'. Then, as I eased my mount a little, we were passed by several other animals, two of which, however, came a cropper at the water directly afterwards.

"For the next furlong or so, The Mandarin kept the lead, closely followed by Pacific; while Sweetbriar was about three lengths away, well clear of the others. At the 'open-ditch,' The Mandarin fell, so givin' Pacific the lead. Sweetbriar, who was sailin' along just beautiful, took off at the jump all right, but pecked a bit on landin', and very nearly unshipped me. It was the first mistake I'd known her to make, and I could only put it down to her bein' startled at the sight of a man who seemed to spring out of her way as she cleared the ditch.

"Before she'd properly righted herself, Sweetbriar was passed by Tearaway — the favourite — and three or four more. The mistake lost us at least half-a-dozen lengths; as, however, there was a matter of two miles still to go, I reckoned we had enough in hand to make up for lost ground. So shaking the mare up a bit, I sent her out after the leaders. She answered my call gamely enough, and by the time the next jump was reached, we were lyin' second again, a few lengths behind Pacific, who appeared to be goin' strong and well.

"To my surprise, Sweetbriar cleared the fence in very slovenly style, and rolled about on landin'. But on bein' righted, she sailed along all serene, and, in a few strides, recovered the ground her bad jumpin' had lost her.

"As we neared home, however, she jumped worse and worse. How I managed to hold her up and keep my seat, I don't know; but I did it somehow, and thankful I was when we brushed through the last obstacle and I saw that there was only two horses in front of us. The two were Pacific and Tearaway, who were now runnin' neck-and-neck. Sweetbriar was about a length and a half behind 'em, the others bein' a good way off.

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"Well, I just touched the mare with my whip, and, taking hold of her bit, she crept up inch by inch. Suddenly Pacific dropped back beaten, leavin' the favourite to fight out the finish with Sweetbriar.

"And that *was* a finish! Runnin' as game as a pebble, my mount got level with Tearaway; then for a few strides they went on locked together, until a few yards from the winnin' post I called on Sweetbriar for a final effort, when, shooting out, she just beat the favourite by a head.

"No sooner had she passed the judge's box, than she swerved right across the course and then stood stock-still, trembling like a leaf.

"Knowin' something was wrong, I jumped off, and, as I did so, Sweetbriar dropped to the ground—dead!

* * * * *

"Mr. Lindley got a veterinary surgeon to examine the dead mare. All he discovered was a thorn embedded in her near shoulder. This thorn was dark-green in colour, and about an inch long.

"'Twas that little bit o' wood that caused poor Sweetbriar's death. For it was a poisonous thorn of a sort which grows in one particular part of India.

"How it got into Sweetbriar's shoulder we didn't know until about two months afterwards, when Mr. Lindley, one day, received by post, a packet containing a queerly-made little air-pistol and a letter.

"The letter bore no address, but the writer of it started by confessin' that he it was who had shot the thorn at Sweetbriar as she landed over the 'open-ditch.' And he it was who had previously tried to dose the mare in her stable.

"Then he went on to say that Captain Denny had promised him £500 in the event of Sweetbriar losin' the National. When the attempt to nobble the mare had failed, the Captain had given him the pistol and poisoned thorn and told him what to do with them.

"In India, where Captain Denny had lived for a time, a scratch from the thorn generally had a fatal effect on either man or beast in somethin' less than a minute. But, for some reason or other, it hadn't acted quite soon enough on poor Sweetbriar, and thus the Captain's little scheme for ruining Mr. Lindley didn't come off.

"On the other hand, Denny had lost so heavily through layin' against the mare that he couldn't, or wouldn't, settle up, and cleared out o' the country. The man he had employed to do the dirty work hadn't received a shillin' for his trouble, which was his reason for roundin' on the Captain.

"Over Sweetbriar's 'National,' Mr. Frank Lindley took a snug little parcel out o' the Ring, but never afterwards did he have any dealin's wi' the Turf. And small blame to him either!"

WON BY A WING.

By Constance Craigie Halkett.

Cyril Benson, taking him all round, was a perfectly sane man—but he was really rather mad on one point (which is, of course, believed by some people to be the case with everybody), and that point was—birds.

I don't mean that he was an amateur bird-fancier, that he kept gorgeous feathered creatures in a cage to win prizes at shows—no power on earth would have induced him to cage any bird, and he utterly despised shows and prizes, the latter because he had drawn nothing else in life's lottery.

No, it was not that. It was on the subject of women wearing birds' feathers in their hats upon which he waxed so eloquent.

He had been known to attack a royal personage—a very stiff royal personage, too—who was so taken aback by his impudence that she listened quite meekly to his observations.

A Duchess, who found him an amusing unit to invite to her house parties, was persuaded by him to insist, when visiting her milliner, that nothing but the feathers of that most unnatural of mothers, the ostrich, should ever be seen on her Grace's head—which, by the way, was rather a clever move on his part, as the said Duchess was young and good-looking, and considered by quite a large number of people as "the glass of fashion and the mould of form."

He was so well known to have this mania that no young woman with any idea of winning his regard (and there were not a few of these, for his rent-roll was large) ever dreamt of appearing before him in a wing-trimmed hat.

As to ospreys it was really better not to mention such things before him—the subject had the same effect upon him as a red rag is popularly supposed to have on a bull—though I must say, in common fairness, that the well-informed section of Society who knew the cruelty practised to obtain these ephemeral vanities cordially agreed with him on this point.

Occasionally he made a convert (as was the case with the Duchess), nearly always, of course, a member of the fair sex. This people began to find rather a bore—an extremely good-looking rich young man with a craze of this kind was one thing, but a girl who attacked everybody on the subject immediately on arriving to stay for a shooting party they found distinctly trying.

The only person who listened to her exhortations with the attention they deserved, was a young curate from the neighbourhood who had been invited to dinner.

The enthusiastic bird-lady was his partner for that meal.

As she was pretty, her words, however foolish, had of course to a male mind a certain amount of weight, and so, when she paused for want of breath, he said with fervour:

"I will join your society, only tell me what I have to do."

"There is only one condition enforced," she said impressively; "one and one only."

"And that is?" he asked eagerly.

"You must never under any circumstances whatever wear wings in your hat!" was the unexpected reply.

The curate looked completely bewildered—the company shouted with glee—but it was some moments before the enthusiastic lady realised the situation.

On another occasion, also at a big house-party, a girl arrived to stay armed with a formidable bundle of

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"tracts"—not, I hasten to add, on religious subjects—all treatises on the manners and customs of birds.

A dear friend of hers was overheard remarking that she believed Cyril Benson was coming, and it was whispered that Lady Lettice would not be averse to——etc., and so on. In point of fact Cyril Benson did turn up next day, and it was not long before everybody noticed that two heads were frequently seen very close together discussing (presumably) the tracts that lay before them. Indeed, things looked so promising for Lady Lettice that people began to say that it had really been very clever of her to work the thing so well.

But, unfortunately for Lady Lettice and her chances, there lived in the near neighbourhood a famous professor

On her head she wore the smartest felt.

of natural history, who had an only daughter whose name was Violet. People who loved her—and they were many—said she was as sweet as her name. People who didn't said that that shy manner of hers was only put on, that violets, even the real ones, only hid themselves in their leaves to make people want to look for them, and so on.

However, when Violet did put in her appearance at the castle one afternoon with her father, the two were voted a distinct success. He with his grand head, interesting talk, and the simplicity of manner which one meets with among the really great of this world—sometimes. She, tall, slender, graceful, masses of golden-brown hair, almost red here and there, large dreamy dark eyes, and the complexion of a girl who has lived a wholesome country life and scorns both powder and paint.

Her dress was just as it should be, though there was a distinct touch of originality about it, and on her head she wore the smartest felt, fresh from "Scott's," and stuck in the folded band of corded silk was a really beautiful blue jay's wing. On this wing Cyril Benson, who was introduced to her, tried to fix his eyes, but they kept wandering to her lovely face in spite of himself, and he forgot all about the jay for a moment while admiring the beautiful curve of throat and chin, and the pretty way her hair grew round her temples, and, above all, noted her entire absence of self-consciousness.

Lady Lettice's prettiness compared to this was the prettiness of a Bond Street female barber's block side by side with a lovely, living woman. Her much befrizzled hair looked almost vulgar beside the thick brown waves into which Violet's fell. However, the blue jay's wing, he told himself, settled the matter.

Here was somebody who badly needed converting, and who more absolutely fitted for the task than himself? He set himself to the work with quite fervent zeal—to find that, when he had said all the things he usually said on the subject so near his heart, this girl was absolutely laughing at him.

Now to Cyril Benson this was a new experience. Women were invariably extremely civil to him, he had been spoilt and petted by them ever since he could remember—not one of them to whom he had condescended to air his views on bird life but had listened with the air of a person who is imbibing highly important, not to say interesting and quite original, information, whereas this girl only laughed!

"My dear sir," she said, in the very quaintest way, when she had finished laughing, laughter which had quite angered him—yet he wished she would laugh again, she looked so adorably pretty, so—"my dear sir, you have been misinformed on one or two points." (Misinformed about birds—he—Cyril Benson!)

"I can speak with assurance on the subject," she went on to explain, "for, as you of course know, natural history is my father's special line of work and research, and as for years he and I have worked together, you understand."

And she proceeded to go over the "points" on which he had been "misinformed," and proved that she knew what she talked about—she never, somehow, gave him the impression that she was airing her knowledge, yet as she spoke she displayed an amount of learning which simply made his brain whirl. She suddenly wound up with:

"So you see really I don't think there is a bird on this earth I don't know something about—but perhaps that is why you talked to me about birds, you thought it was my subject, eh? Now, that is a mistake, you know, people wouldn't always rather talk about their subjects, they want to break up fresh ground, you see."

Cyril Benson looked at her reproachfully.

"Do you mean to tell me that you don't know that that is my subject?" he asked.

She threw up her hands in mock despair.

"What!" she said, "you a naturalist too? Well, then,

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I suppose I must resign myself to talk shop. Let me see, what do you think of Professor Merton's discovery?"

"I've never heard of it."

She stared at him.

"Never heard of it!" she repeated, "and you a naturalist! That is queer."

"I'm not a naturalist!" he said, quite snappishly, "I'm only the president of the S.F.P.O.C.T.B."

"Ah!" she said, "I have heard of that—the Society

"Never heard of it!" she repeated, "and you a naturalist."

For Preventing Outcasts Coming To Britain—don't you find that rather difficult?"

"It means nothing of the sort," he said stiffly. "It means the Society For Prevention Of Cruelty To Birds."

"Is that it? You must forgive me, but when people talk in capital letters it is really hard to know. You see one letter stands for so many things, doesn't it? But to return to our subject—so you are the president of that Society? Why, how shocked you must be at my blue jay's wing; yet if you knew its history you would really think that blue jay deserved his fate. Our gamekeeper shot it—it was busy pecking a young pigeon to death."

"That is an exceptional case."

"I know, I am only telling you because I don't like you to think bad things about me in your heart."

Cyril Benson's face brightened perceptibly.

"You don't like me to—" he began to repeat her words—then paused—"now that is very good of you—to mind what I think one way or the other."

She laughed softly.

"People do mind as a rule, don't they?" she asked.

He smiled broadly.

"They do." he said slowly, "which is probably why you have put me into such a bad temper. I'm not used to being contradicted—it makes me see myself in a new light."

"And that is?"

"A very ludicrous one."

"How good for your conceit!" she told him gaily.

"Very!—but it's so disagreeable—like looking at oneself in a French mirror."

"That is simply a caricature," she said quickly; "and that is what you could never be."

He bowed gravely.

"Thank you, I am grateful for small mercies in this vale of tears. I see your father is preparing to go—you are walking? Yes? Then may I go part of the way back with you—I need the exercise, there was no shoot to-day."

Violet assented, and the three moved off together.

"There," said Mrs. Lindsay to Mrs. Hamilton, "at last is a girl who is evidently not setting her cap at Cyril Benson. It's really quite a relief."

"Not her cap, it is true," said Mrs. Hamilton, "but—did you see her hat?"

"Certainly I did—what of that?"

"She wore a blue jay's wing!"

"Well—that goes to prove what I have just said—indeed it was seeing that blue jay's wing gave rise to my remark."

"My dear Laura!" said her friend quite sorrowfully, "you are really not so 'quick at the uptake,' as we say in the Highlands, as I thought you were. Don't you see? All the other girls have taken the wings out of their hats in order to win Mr. Benson—and have failed. She has put a wing into hers for the same reason—it was a thoroughly original idea—she really deserves success."

A male listener, sitting close by, shook his head.

"Those women, those women!" he groaned; "they have, from time immemorial, made mountains out of molehills. This time they have arranged a marriage—on the strength of a blue jay's wing!"

But, a few months later, when he read a certain announcement in the list of fashionable marriages of the *Morning Post*, he had to allow that the two good ladies had been right.

Splendid new serial coming soon.
See "Editor's Page."

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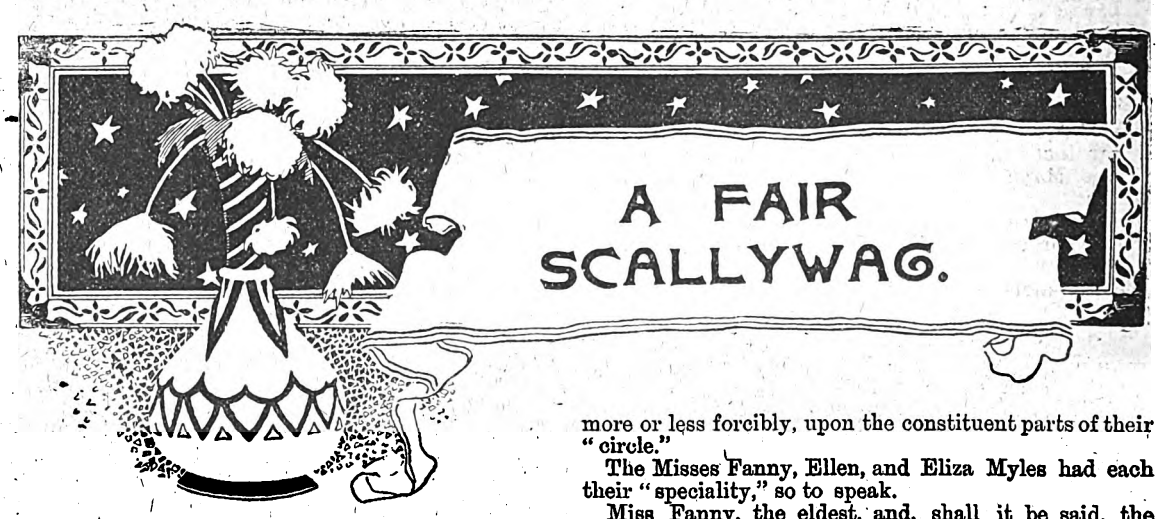

NOBODY was quite sure where she came from.

This, she being, evidently, only just out of her "teens," was, in a way, unfortunate,—socially; for girls of tender age (and "twenty" is, in more senses than one, a tender age) ought not in the opinion of most right-thinking people, to be objects of doubt and suspicion.

Frankly, there was much—very much, that was attractive about Tita Neene; and the more attractive a woman is, or is thought to be, the greater is other people's curiosity with regard to her.

She had descended upon the inhabitants of Clinton Crescent, South Kensington, with a suddenness that had taken the general breath away.

A few days sufficed to prove that she had abundant means; and that the elderly female, who appeared to officiate dually as housekeeper and duenna, was of that rare and old-fashioned type, so seldom to be met with now-a-days; foster-mother almost; devoted humble friend quite.

Speculation with regard to the new-comer had its first beginning at No. 1; the tenants of which demand a descriptive word or two.

Three maiden ladies, sisters, were they, of——well, not uncertain age, the hand of time being only too plainly apparent.

The impress would not, perhaps, have been so noticeable, but for the fact that all the three (I regret to say it, but truth must out) were undeniably plain—some declared even downright ugly.

Be this as it might, one thing was clear, beyond argument or dispute, that they were more than ordinarily well-to-do; owning, as they did, indeed, the larger proportion of the houses in the Crescent. This rendered it somewhat surprising that, in spite of personal drawbacks, they had been unsuccessful in attracting the more needy of the bachelor tribe.

They were the surviving daughters of a certain long-deceased naval officer, and sometime member of Her Majesty's Corps of Gentlemen-at-Arms. This fact they never failed upon any and every opportunity to impress, more or less forcibly, upon the constituent parts of their "circle."

The Misses Fanny, Ellen, and Eliza Myles had each their "speciality," so to speak.

Miss Fanny, the eldest, and, shall it be said, the plainest of the trio, lived but for the card-table, her taste for whist amounting almost to a passion.

Miss Ellen was of a pensive, soulful (doleful, the ribald called it) disposition, she having, so report said, been the victim of an early disappointment, whatever that may mean.

Miss Eliza was the kitten, the frivolous young thing, whose particular forte was the trilling out, in the weakest, squeakiest voice imaginable, such highly exhilarating ditties as "By the sad sea waves"; (Miss Fanny assisting with the seconds) "My heart's in the Highlands"; "Teach me how to woo, love," and so on.

The "Three Graces"; (by which not inappropriate title they were, *sub-rosa*, known among their friends and acquaintances); were, therefore, a "shining" sisterhood, and locally a social power to be reckoned with and considered.

"No girl of her age, who is anybody, would be here in such a position; nobody knowing anything about her, too," said Miss Fanny.

"Something ought to be done about it!" said Miss Ellen. "It's not nice for other girls," plainly implying by her manner that they, the Misses Myles, were to be included in the "threatened."

"I hate her!" comprehensively said Miss Eliza. "I hear that she has talked about us already—says that my singing is—there, I hate her!"

"Well, girls," said Miss Fanny, in virtue of her seniorship, "she has only been here a fortnight. We will give her a month, and if, at the end of that time we have not discovered something—well, wrong about her, I will be content not to play another game of whist as long as I live."

Of course all this went the round of the "circle," to the intense relish and satisfaction of everybody.

Meanwhile, the subject of all this talk and delicate attention seemed to be not only quite unconscious of anything of the sort, but, on the contrary, as indifferent to public criticism and opinion as could well be.

To the disgust of the "Three Graces," more especially, Tita Neene rode, cycled, motored, and drove, in a perfectly reckless and outrageous manner, and with no

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other attendant, in the first and last instances, than a strange, aristocratic young man, who on such occasions, drove or rode up to the door of Number Six; the pair going off together in the highest of spirits, and without the faintest suspicion of conventional "priggery."

The gentleman was absolutely unknown in the "Crescent," which, of course, only added to the heinousness of the offence, and the turpitude of the offender.

But there was worse behind.

One, Major Bland, a retired Army veteran, and a prominent member of the "circle," deposed, at a select evening gathering for card-playing and scandal-mongering purposes, at Number One, that the "adventuress" (so they had be-labelled her) had been seen at the theatre—alone—in the Pit!

He, Major Bland, was the witness on this awful indictment; although, he somewhat marred his testimony by confessing that he had felt half-inclined to offer his services; second thoughts, however, deciding him that he had perhaps better not.

"I should think not, indeed!" cried Miss Eliza, hysterically. "Why there is no knowing what the result might have been; these adventuresses are so artful, you know."

"Perhaps so," said the Major. "But there's no denying that she's not bad-looking; and she can take care of herself."

"Not bad-looking!" almost screamed Miss Ellen. "I'm astonished at you, Major!—but there, you men are all alike—you have no discrimination, and—no taste!"

Now, if the Major had been absolutely straightforward, and had told all that he knew, I verily believe that nothing short of a social cataclysm would have resulted.

From something, however, that I have since heard, it appears that on the evening of Miss Tita's escapade, she, although actually there alone, was seen by the Major to meet this same young fellow outside, whence, entering a hansom, they drove South Kensington-wards in company.

After all, the old soldier was not a bad sort, for while, by sheer force of habit, still superficially faithful to his little *coterie*, he was, nevertheless, resolved to neutralise, so far as in him lay, the baleful efforts of his lady friends to "crush" the maiden at Number Six.

Perhaps, indeed, he was influenced in this direction by an *esprit de corps*—a fellow feeling—he being persuaded, from certain unmistakable signs and indications that the gentlemanly young flutterer of the Clinton Crescent dovecote was a military man.

His Majesty's uniform could never cover anything save honour, chivalry and rectitude of purpose! There are of course, exceptions, but then, the major had implicit faith in the "cloth," and ignored "exceptions" as being alike misleading and vicious.

Everything that Tita did, or wore, or was reported to have said, was taken up, enlarged, and immediately sat in judgment upon.

The poor girl, affecting a style of dress, now came to be associated with the "mannish" set—the tailor-made "New Woman."

A walking-stick (crooked) too! and, oh, horror! the shameless hussy had been seen by Sister Ellen as the latter, one afternoon, was walking past Number Six; to be smoking!—smoking a cigarette, behind the flimsy veil of the lace curtains, at the open window.

Then her correspondence, it was enormous! Every post seemed to bring her a very avalanche of letters. Had eyes been X. Rays, Tita's epistolary secrets—if secrets they were—would assuredly soon have been public property.

"Well," said Miss Fanny, one morning, after a more than unusually large delivery, "if brother John's child ever turns up, and displays wanton and unmaidenly freedom such as this, we would—at least *I* would—disown her!"

The other two-thirds of the trio chorused a hearty acquiescence.

Brother John, it may be said, the fair virgins' only brother, had, owing to some disagreement with his father nearly thirty years before, emigrated to parts unknown.

But for a casually-seen birth-notice in an American paper, the sisters would never have known that he had even married; much less that a daughter had been born to him.

As time went on they concluded that his return to England was not to be looked for, and so, beyond an occasional and brief reference to the family scapegrace, he and his passed, for all practical purposes, out of the daily life and interests of the "Three Graces."

* * * * *

Clinton Crescent is nothing if not exclusive, and it will, therefore, he readily imagined that it was stirred to its deepest depth by the startling announcement that Miss Tita Neene would give a dinner party, and an after-dinner reception upon the evening of January 20th.

When the invitations to this function were duly received by the "cream" of the "circle," all was astonishment and open-mouthed indecision.

"To go" or "not to go," that was the question; but as the bell-wethers, (I crave their pardon; the "Three Graces"); decided to accept, the hesitant phase passed, to be succeeded by the curiously expectant.

Tita received her guests with none of that freedom of speech and manner with which she was credited, and which was so objectionable to the more precise among her neighbours.

No lady, howsoever high her station, and good her breeding, could have possibly surpassed her, as, with exactly the right word and the right gesture she smilingly bid welcome to the little crowd of censoriously-disposed critics.

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A good thing . . . .
If you can't get . . . .
That good thing . . .
Supplied fast enough . .

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All was so quiet, so unobtrusively "proper," that nothing in the shape of a "sensation" was even suspected as being imminent.

The dinner over, the reception began. The wealth and fashion of Clinton Crescent flowed up and down the flower-decked stairway, exchanging low-voiced opinions, or indulging in, what I fear I must write, hypocritically enthusiastic comments upon both entertainment and hostess.

Then it was noticed that the "Three Graces" were not making any movement towards departing.

A pink note, delivered about half-past eleven to Miss Fanny, by a servant, ran as follows:

> Will Miss Myles, and her sisters kindly remain for a few moments after all have gone.
>
> Tita Neene.

Most extraordinary! What could it mean?

The last guest had departed, and in the pretty, deserted-looking, wax-lit drawing-room there lingered only the wondering sisters, and—Tita.

* * * * *

It will be long before Clinton Crescent recovers from the shock it experienced at that which took place the next morning.

About noon, Miss Ellen was seen to sally forth, and, making her way to Number Six, to ascend the steps, and knock at the door.

In something less than a quarter-of-an-hour she emerged again with—Tita, with whom she returned to Number One.

Later the following facts leaked out.

Tita Neene was the daughter of brother John, deceased twelve months before, and being her father's daughter, and inheriting the more harmless of his eccentricities, she had adopted this original method of claiming acquaintance with her paternal relatives.

Her surname, Neene, was explained by her having taken it on succeeding to the large fortune of her mother's only brother, a well-known Wall Street broker of New York.

But who was the mysterious young man? Clinton Crescent obstinately refused complete absolution until his intrusion into the story was satisfactorily explained.

This, however, was soon done.

Douglas Grant, the son of people to whom Tita had brought introductions from Montreal, had during the few weeks she had passed in his mother's house, on her first arrival in England, learnt to love her; the rides and drives being the natural outcome.

They were both of them unconventional to a degree; although his "fair Scallywag," as he came to call her, easily distanced him in the race for the "out-of-the-way."

* * * * *

The end of things was even more extraordinary, inasmuch as it went a long way towards realising the "improbable."

The "Three Graces" by reason, maybe, of their niece's winning personality, developed, individually and collectively, wondrous changes; and, though still, in every sense of the word, eminently anti-progressive, displayed a most praiseworthy inclination to take a more rational view of life in general, and of their own in particular.

Ralph Enderby.

The Two Beryls.

Eric Creighton found it difficult to refuse a favour under any circumstances, but to have to refuse when the girl whom he admired above all others was the suppliant was hard lines indeed.

However, there was no option in this case. The Reverend James Wainwright was as unholy as he was unpopular, Eric knew, and the last man in the world to whom he would have thought of presenting the living of Penthurst. That he was the brother of Beryl Wainwright (whom he had met with her mother the previous year in Scotland) made the case a matter of sacrifice.

Beryl had given him no hope of winning her; on the contrary she had let him understand that he was only the companion of a pleasant holiday. And now she had written to him and asked a favour. What a joy it would have been to him to have granted it. By refusing he fully realised that he was forfeiting all claims to her better acquaintanceship. When a woman condescends to ask a favour from a man who loves her she does not expect a rebuff.

All the same he was surprised at her request because the misdeeds of the applicant were well known. But probably she was blinded to his true character by her sisterly affection.

Thinking of all this, Eric, nevertheless, bestowed the living elsewhere, for to please no woman could he abuse the trust reposed in him.

In the course of the next week Eric had to attend some important meetings in the next county. With a heavy heart he arrived at Blankboro', for it was the home of Beryl Wainwright and every reminder of her was tinged with sadness.

* * * * *

"Ah, how do you do, Mr, Creighton? So good of you to spare us an hour or two this evening when you are so busy. You know Miss Wainwright, I believe, will you take her in to dinner?" And Lady Hadley turned to her next guest.

Left together Beryl held out her hand smiling and opened the conversation.

"You have not been to see us since you came to Blankboro', Mr. Creighton. My mother was sorry, as she had something she particularly wished to say to you."

Eric flushed.

"I thought that your mother would, naturally, not care to see me after my ungracious behaviour."

"I did not know—what was it? You see I have only just come home from America and have not had time to hear all the news. But I'm sure you are mistaken, mother will be delighted to see you."

"America! Have you been home long?"

"Only arrived the day before yesterday. I'm glad I came back in time for the first meet. Are you hunting this season?"

Eric was getting bewildered. Ignoring Beryl's question he asked:

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"But your letter was from Blankboro', you wrote to me from here, did you not?"

"I have never written to you in my life, Mr. Creighton. What are you referring to? I don't suppose you have ever seen my handwriting."

"No, not before, that is true. But really this is curious. There seems to be some mystery here."

Beryl's annoyance vanished when she saw that her companion was in genuine distress. However, her attention was at that moment diverted by her neighbour on the right, who had been trying for some time to attract her notice.

Left for a moment to his own thoughts Eric began to feel less despondent; evidently there had been no great resentment of his conduct, but he was utterly at a loss to understand her forgetfulness.

After a short discussion Beryl turned to Eric again.

"You must tell me about this mystery. What did I write to you about?"

"The living, you know."

"But I'm afraid I don't know."

Then Eric explained that when a living he had in his gift had become vacant he had an application from the Rev. James Wainwright who was well-known to him by name, inclosing a note signed Beryl Wainwright.

"Until then I had no idea that you were his sister," he added.

Beryl was silent for a moment.

"And your answer," she asked at last, then, noticing the look on her face she understood.

"You thought he was my brother. You knew him by repute, and thought I had asked this thing of you, and said no. May I ask what was in the note?"

"So far as I can remember it was worded 'I shall look upon the appointment of my brother as a personal favour.'"

"Probably my mother wished to explain matters to you, her name is Beryl and the Rev. James Wainwright is my uncle. Can you come to see mother to-morrow afternoon?"

"May I come to see you Beryl?" he asked, looking into her eyes.

She met his look of love and hope and answered:

"This afternoon I would have said no; now—I say yes."

R. C.

MURDER.

£100 REWARD.

WHO KILLED JAMES TRENT?

The sum of One Hundred Pounds will be given by the Proprietors of "Pearson's Weekly" to that person who, between April 4 and April 23, first acquaints them with the name of the individual or individuals

WHO KILLED JAMES TRENT,

and the manner in which he was killed. A full description of James Trent and those suspected of having murdered him will be found in "Pearson's Weekly," published on April 4.

WHO KILLED JAMES TRENT?

Nothing so weirdly mysterious as this story has ever been written. It opens with James Trent, the man of many millions, sitting at the head of his dinner table, stabbed to the heart. Nobody is in the room with him at the moment of his death, though several people are within ear-shot. They stand talking on the other side of the only door leading into his room, and that door is open. Nobody is concealed within the room; it has no secret doors either in the walls, the ceiling, or the floor. It has no chimney—at least no chimney down which any person could squeeze. It has one window partly open, yet the flowers and ferns have not been disturbed; there is an area and a spiked iron railing protecting this window. Obviously, it is impossible to enter that way. Then WHO KILLED JAMES TRENT, and how was he killed? It is a maddening mystery. The police find the task hopeless; his friends are in despair.

WHO KILLED JAMES TRENT? The most weird, the most mysterious, the most fascinating story ever written. Starts in PEARSON'S WEEKLY on April 4th. Order now.

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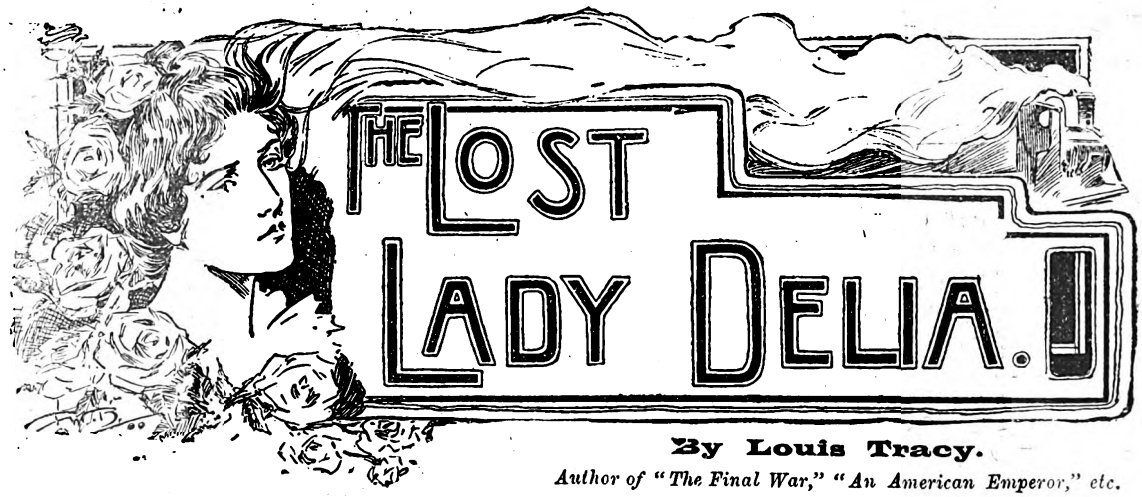

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

CHAPTER XVII. (*continued*).

"Evidently. She was surprised last Thursday week to receive a telegram asking her to meet him at York Railway Station. When she got there he asked her to write the letter he handed to you and to post it in London on Saturday evening. He explained that his action was due to his keen anxiety to shield his wife's name, and that this letter would settle the affair altogether. As he handed her another bundle of notes, and promised to settle £100 a year on her for life, she was willing enough to help him. During your interview with her you guessed the reason why she wrote Lady Delia's hand so perfectly. She had copied it for three years."

"All this must have astonished you considerably?"

"Mr. Brett, astonished isn't the word, I was flabbergasted. Once she started talking I let her alone, only rattling the handcuffs when she seemed inclined to stop. But all the time I felt as if the top of my head had been blown off."

"I imagine she had not much more to tell you?"

"She pitched into you as the cause of all the mischief, and went so far as to say that she was sure it was not Sir Charles who killed Lady Delia, but you yourself."

Brett winced at Jane Harding's logic. Were he able to retrieve the past three months the mystery of Lady Delia's death would have remained a mystery for ever.

"Now about the photograph," said the detective. "After I had left Jane Harding with a solemn warning to speak to no one until I saw her again, I made a round of the fashionable photographers, and soon obtained an excellent likeness of Sir Charles. I showed it to Dobson, and she said: 'That is Colonel Montgomery.' I showed it to the foreman of the furniture warehouse, and he said: 'That is the image of the man who ordered Mrs. Hilmer's suite. Now, what on earth is the upshot of this business to be? I called at Wensley House, but was told Sir Charles was not in town. Had he been in, I would not have seen him until I had discussed matters with you."

"That is very good of you, Mr. Winter. May I ask your reason for showing him this consideration?"

The policeman, who was very earnest and very excited, banged his hand on the table as he cried:

"Don't you see what all this amounts to? I have no option but to arrest Sir Charles Lyle for the murder of his wife."

"That is the sad conclusion."

"And do you believe he killed her?"

"Strange as it may seem to you, I do not."

"And I'm jiggered if I do, either."

"I—I am greatly obliged to you, Winter."

Brett bent his head almost to his knees, and for some minutes there was complete silence.

When he again looked at the detective there were tears in his eyes.

"What can we do to unravel this tangled skein without creating untold mischief?" he murmured.

"It beats me, sir," was the perplexed answer. "But when I came in I imagined that Jane Harding or someone had been to see you. Surely you had learnt something of all this before my arrival?"

"Yes indeed. I had reached your goal, but by a different route. Unfortunately, my discovery only goes to confirm yours."

Brett then told him of his visit to the lawyer's office, and its result.

Mr. Winter listened to the recital with knitted brows. "It is very clear," he said, when Reggie had ended, "that Lady Delia was killed in Mrs. Hilmer's flat, that Sir Charles Lyle knew of her death, that he himself conveyed the body to the river bank at Putney, and that ever since he has tried to throw dust in our eyes, and prevent any knowledge of the true state of affairs reaching us."

"Your summary cannot be disputed in the least particular."

"Well, Mr. Brett, we must do *something*. If you don't like to interfere, then *I* must."

"There is but one person in the world who can enlighten us as to the facts. That person obviously is Sir Charles Lyle himself."

"Unquestionably."

Brett looked at his watch. It was 10.30 p.m. He rose.

"Let us go to him," he said.

"But he is not in London."

"He is. I expect you will find that he gave orders for no one to be admitted, and told the servants to say he had left town to make the denial more emphatic."

"It will be a terrible business, I fear, Mr. Brett."

"I dread it—on my soul I do. But I cannot shirk this final attempt to save my friend. My presence may tend to help forward a final and full explanation. No matter what the pain to myself, I must be present. Come, it is late already!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Sir Charles Lyle's Journey.

The streets were comparatively deserted as they drove quickly up Whitehall and across the lower side of Trafalgar Square. It is a common belief, even amongst Londoners themselves, that the traffic is dense in the main thorough-

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fares at all hours of the night until twelve o'clock has long past.

But to the experienced eye there is a marked hiatus between half-past nine and eleven o'clock. At such a time Charing Cross is negotiable, Piccadilly Circus loses much of its terror, and a hansom may turn out of Regent Street into Oxford Street without the fare being impelled to clutch convulsively at the brass window-slide in a make-believe effort to save the vehicle from being crushed like a walnut shell between two heavy 'buses.

Such considerations did not appeal to Brett and his companion on this occasion.

For some inexplicable cause they both felt that they were in a desperate hurry.

A momentary stoppage at the turn into Orchard Street caused each man to swear, quite unconsciously. Now that the supreme moment in this most painful investigation was at hand they resented the slightest delay. Though they were barely fifteen minutes in the cab it seemed an hour before they alighted at Wensley House, Portman Square.

In response to an imperative ring a footman appeared. Instead of answering the barrister's question as to whether Sir Charles Lyle was at home or not, he said: "You are Mr. Brett, sir, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Sir Charles is at home, but he retired to his room before dinner. He is not well and he may have gone to bed, but he said that if you came you were to be admitted. I will ask Mr. Thompson."

"Better send Thompson to me," said Brett decisively; and in a minute the old butler stood before him.

"I hear that Sir Charles has retired for the night," said Brett.

Thompson had caught sight of Winter standing on the steps. A few hours earlier he had himself told the policeman that the baronet was out of town. It was an awkward dilemma, and he coughed doubtingly whilst he racked his brains for a judicious answer.

But Brett grasped his difficulty. "It is all right, Thompson. Mr. Winter quite understands the position. Do you think Sir Charles is in bed?"

"I will go and see, sir. He was very anxious that you should be sent upstairs if you called. But that was when he was in the library."

Brett and the detective entered the hall, the butler closed the door behind them, and then solemnly ascended the stairs to Sir Charles Lyle's bedroom, which was situated on the first floor along a corridor towards the back of the house.

They distinctly heard the polite knock on the door and Thompson's voice, "Are you asleep, Sir Charles?"

After a pause there was another knock, and the same question in a slightly louder key.

Then the butler returned, saying as he came down the stairs: "Sir Charles seems to be sound asleep, sir."

Brett and Winter exchanged glances. The barrister was disappointed, almost perturbed, but he said: "In that case we will not disturb him. Sir Charles does not often retire so early."

"No, sir. I have never known him go to his room so early before. He told me not to serve dinner as he wasn't well. He would not let me get anything for him. He just took some wine, and I have not seen him since."

"Since when?"

"About 7.30, sir."

Brett turned to depart, but Thompson, with the privilege of an old servant when talking to one whom he knew to be on familiar terms with his master, whispered:

"That there blessed maid turned up again this afternoon, sir."

The barrister started violently.

"Not Jane Harding, surely?"

"Yes, sir. She came at four o'clock and asked for Sir Charles, as bold as brass."

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If you have rheumatism, write to me, and I will send you, free of cost, a trial package of a harmless remedy, which cured me and thousands of others, among them cases of over fifty years' standing. It is a grand remedy, and in order that every suffering reader may learn about it, I will gladly send them a Trial Package free, even if more than 25,000 invalids should apply. Many a distressing case of rheumatism, among them some which defied Hospital, Drugs, Electricity, and medical skill, were successfully cured. In Denham, Ind., U.S.A., it cured a lady, who then cured fifteen of her neighbours. In Prosser, Nebr., U.S.A., it cured Mrs. C. Morritz, who had been afflicted for fifty-two years. In Fountain City, Wis., U.S.A., it cured Hon. Jacob Sexauer, after suffering for thirty-three years, notwithstanding having employed seven physicians. At 130 Oak Street, Vincennes, Ind., U.S.A., this remedy rescued Miss Emma Callender from a case of rheumatism, which her physicians considered fatal. Rev. C. Sund, of Harrisville, Wis., U.S.A., testifies that this remedy cured two members of his congregation, one who had suffered eighteen, the other twenty-five years. In England the following have written me cordial letters of thanks, and testify that they have been completely cured of rheumatism through Gloria Tonic: J. E. Smith, of Ranskill, Notts; Mrs. C. Gregory, of South Woodford, Essex; Mr. W. Booth, of Dudley, near Huddersfield; Miss Mary Fullon, of Bally Truckle; Mrs. Henry Bester, of Weldon, near Daventry. Thousands of similar instances could be mentioned where this horrible plague has been completely cured. Write at once for a free trial package and other information, for it is an honest remedy that you can test before you part with your money. Be sure and write your name plainly and give your full address, to avoid any mistakes in delivery. Mr. Smith's principal offices are in Germania Building, Milwaukee, Wis., U.S.A., but for the convenience of the British public he has also opened London offices. Address all letters to John A. Smith (Dept. 1007), 6 and 7 Stonecutter Street, London, E.C.

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"Did he see her?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Do you hear that, Winter?"

The detective nodded.

"She must have been here about half-an-hour before me," he said, addressing the butler.

"That's about right, sir."

"But I understood," went on Brett, "that Sir Charles was not at home to ordinary callers?"

Thompson shuffled about somewhat uneasily. He wished now he had held his tongue. "I had my orders, sir," he murmured, in extenuation of his apparently diverse actions.

"Tell me what your orders were," persisted Brett.

The man hesitated, not wishful to offend his master's friend, but too well trained to reveal the explicit instructions given him by Sir Charles Lyle.

"Do not be afraid. I will explain everything to Sir Charles personally. We cannot best judge what to do—whether to wake him or not—unless we know the position," went on the barrister.

Thus absolved from blame, Thompson took from his waistcoat pocket a folded sheet of notepaper.

"I don't pretend to understand the reason, sir," he said, "but Sir Charles wrote this himself, and told me to be careful to obey him exactly."

The barrister eagerly grasped the note and read:

If Mr. Brett, Jane Harding, or Mrs. Hilmer should call, admit any of them immediately. To all others say that I have left town—some days ago, should they ask you.

C. L.

Winter, the round-eyed and bullet-headed, gazed with goggle orbs over Brett's shoulder.

"That settles it, Mr. Brett," he said. "We *must* see him."

"Thompson," said Brett, "does Sir Charles usually lock his door?"

"Never, sir."

"Very well. Knock again, and then try the door. We will come with you."

Something in the barrister's manner rather than his words sent cold shivers down the old butler's spine.

"I do hope there's nothing wrong, sir," he commenced; but Brett was already halfway up the stairs. Both he and Winter guessed what had happened. They knew that poor Thompson's repeated summons at the bed-room door would remain for ever unanswered—that the unfortunate baronet had quitted the dread certainties of this world for the uncertainties of the next.

They were not mistaken. A few minutes later they found him listlessly drooping over the side of the chair in which he was seated, partly undressed, and seemingly overcome at the moment when he was about to take off his boots.

On a table near him were two bottles, each half-emptied, and an empty wineglass. Each of the bottles bore the label of a well-known chemist. One was indorsed "Sleeping draught," the other "Poison," and "Chloral."

The three men were pale as the limp inanimate form in the chair whilst they silently noted these details. Brett raised the head of his friend in the hope that life might not yet be extinct. But Sir Charles Lyle had taken his measures effectually. Though the *rigor mortis* had not set in, he had evidently been dead some time.

Thompson, quite beside himself with grief, dropped to his knees by his master's side.

"Sir Charles!" he wailed. "Sir Charles! For the love of Heaven speak to us. You can't be dead. Oh you can't! It ain't fair. You're too young to die. What curse has come upon the house that both should go?"

Brett leant over and shook the old butler firmly by the shoulder.

"Thompson," he said, impressively, for now that the crisis he feared had come and gone, he exercised full control over himself. "Thompson, if you ever wished to serve Sir Charles Lyle you must do so now by remaining calm. For his sake help us, and do not create an unnecessary scene."

Governed by the more powerful nature, the affrighted man staggered to his feet.

"What shall I do, sir?" he whimpered. "Shall I send for a doctor?"

"Yes; say Sir Charles is very ill. Not a word to a soul about what has happened until we have carefully examined the room."

At that instant Mr. Winter caught sight of a large and bulky envelope, which had fallen to the floor and rested against a leg of the chair on which Sir Charles Lyle was seated.

Picking it up he found it was addressed, "Reginald Brett, Esq. To be delivered to him *at once*."

"This will explain matters, I expect," said the detective.

"Whatever could have come to my master to do such a thing?" groaned Thompson, turning to reach the door.

"Come back," cried Brett sharply. "Now look here, Thompson," he went on, placing both his hands on the butler's shoulders and looking him straight in the eyes, "it is imperative that you should pull yourself together. That sort of remark will never do. Sir Charles has simply taken an overdose of chloral accidentally. He has slept badly ever since Lady Lyle's death, you understand, and has been in the habit of taking sleeping draughts. Now, before you leave the room tell me exactly what has happened, in your own language."

"I can't put it together now, sir, but I won't say anything to anybody. You can trust me for that. Why, I loved him as my own son, I did."

"Yes, I know that well. But remember! An overdose. An accident. Nothing else. Do you follow me?"

"Quite, sir. Heaven help us all."

"Very well. Now send for the doctor, without needlessly alarming the other servants."

Brett placed the envelope in the pocket of his overcoat, saying to the detective: "We will examine this later, Winter. Just now we must do what we can to avoid a scandal. The case between Lady Delia and her husband will be settled by a higher tribunal than we had counted upon."

"It certainly *looks* like an accident, Mr. Brett," was the answer, "but it all depends upon the view the doctor takes. And you know, of course, that I shall have to report the real facts to my superiors."

"That is obvious. Yet no harm is done at this early stage in taking such steps as may finally render undue publicity needless. It may be impossible: but on the other hand, until we have heard Sir Charles' version, contained, I suppose, in this letter to me, it is advisable to sustain the theory of an accidental death."

"Anything I can do to help you will be done," replied the detective. With that they dropped the subject, and more carefully scrutinized the room.

To all intents and purposes Sir Charles Lyle might have inadvertently brought about the catastrophe. The sleeping-draught bore the ledger number of its prescription, and there is nothing unusual in a patient striving to help the cautious dose ordered by a physician by the addition of a more powerful nostrum.

His partly-dressed state, too, argued that he had taken the fatal mixture at a time when he contemplated retiring to rest forthwith. A fire still burnt in the grate, and on the mantelpiece—in a position where the baronet must see it until the moment when all things faded from his vision—was a beautiful miniature of his wife.

The detective, with professional nonchalance, soon sat down. There was nothing to do but to await the arrival of the doctor, and having heard his report, to go home.

In the quietude of the room, with the strain of paramount necessity for caution relaxed, Brett was profoundly moved at the spectacle of his dead friend. Whatever his logical faculties might argue he could not regard this man as a murderer. If Lady Lyle met her death at his hand then it

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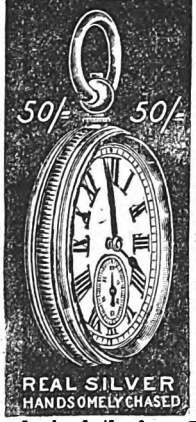

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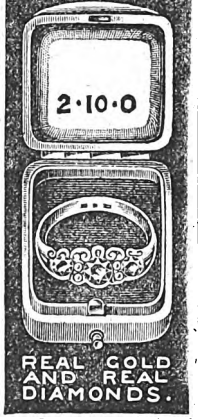

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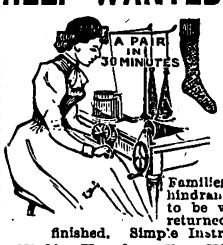

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must have been the result of some terrible mistake—of some momentary outburst of passion which never contemplated such a sequel.

Poisons which kill by stupefaction do not distort their victims as in cases where violent irritants are used.

Sir Charles Lyle might have been in deep sleep, exhausted by toil or pain—sleep the counterfeit of death—whilst the bright colours and speaking eyes of the miniature counterfeited life. Standing between these two—both the mere images of the man and the woman he had known so well—the barrister insensibly felt that at last they had peace.

It was his first experience of the tremendous change in the relationship established by death. It utterly overpowered him. No mere words could express his emotions. Between him and those that had been was imposed the implacable wall of eternity.

A bustle in the hall beneath aroused him from his grief-stricken stupor, and Mr. Winter's commonplace tones sounded strange to his ears.

"Here's the doctor."

A well-known physician hastened to the room. Thompson had carefully followed instructions, for the doctor was not prepared for the condition of affairs that a glance revealed to his practised eye.

"Surely he is not dead?" he cried, looking from the form in the chair to the two men.

Brett answered him:

"Yes, for some hours, I fear, but we wanted to avoid spreading unnecessary rumours until——"

"I understand. My poor friend! How came this to happen?"

The skilled practitioner merely lifted one of the dead man's eyelids, and then turned to examine the bottles on the table.

"My own prescription," he said, after tasting the contents of one phial. "Ah, this was bad; why did he not consult me?" and he sadly shook his head as he tasted the remaining liquid in the second.

"What do you make of it?" said Brett.

He looked the other steadily in the face and the doctor interpreted the cause of his anxiety.

"A clear case of accidental poisoning," he replied, "Sir Charles has consulted me several times during the past week on account of his extreme insomnia. I specifically warned him against overdoing my treatment. Change of air, exercise, and diet are the true specifics for sleeplessness, especially when induced, as his was, by a morbid state of mind."

"You mean——"

"That Sir Charles has never recovered from the shock of his wife's death. I did not know of it myself until it was announced recently, and I gathered from him that the manner of her demise was partly unaccounted for. Altogether, it is a sad business that such a couple should be taken in such manner."

Mr. Winter was industriously taking notes the while, and the doctor regarded him with a questioning look.

"This gentleman is in the police," explained Brett.

"Indeed!"

"Yes. We came here by mere accident. Mr. Winter and I were engaged in an important inquiry—the cause of Lady Delia's disappearance, in fact—and we hurried here at a late hour to consult with Sir Charles. Hence our presence and this discovery."

"How strange!"

"There is no reason now," broke in the detective, "why the body should not be moved?"

Brett shuddered at the phrase. It suggested the inevitable.

"Not in the least. I am quite satisfied as to the cause of death."

The dispatch of telegrams and other necessary details kept Brett busily employed until two o'clock.

Then he rushed off to his own chambers, and in the privacy of his own library he was at last able to break the seal of the packet left for him as the final act and word of the late Sir Charles Lyle.

CHAPTER XXIX.

How Lady Delia Disappeared.

(Being the MS. left by Sir Charles Lyle, Bart., and addressed to Reginald Brett, Esq., Barrister-at-Law.)

It is customary, I believe, for poor wretches who are sentenced to undergo the last punishment of the law to be allowed a three weeks' respite between the date of their sentence and that on which they are executed. I am in the position of such a one. The difference between me and the convicted felon lies merely in detail, and in most respects I am worse situated than he. My period of agony is longer drawn out, I am condemned to die by my own hand, I am mocked by the surroundings of luxury, taunted by the knowledge that though life and even a sort of happiness are within my reach I must not avail myself of them.

There may come a time in the affairs of any man when he is compelled to choose between a dishonoured existence and voluntary death. These unpleasant alternatives are now before me. You, who know me, would never doubt which of them I should adopt, nor will you upbraid me because our judgments coincide. There is nothing for it, Brett, but quiet death in the least obtrusive form, and so disposed that it may be possible for you, chief among my friends and the only person I can trust to fulfil my wishes, to arrange matters, so that my memory may be speedily forgotten. My virtues, I fear, will not secure me immortality; my faults, I hope, will not be spread broadcast to cram the maws of gaping scandalmongers.

If I do not shirk this final issue neither do I crave pity. In setting forth plainly the history of my wife's death and its results, I am actuated solely by a desire to protect others from needless suspicion. Having resolved to pay forfeit for my own errors, I claim to have expiated them. This document is an explanation, not a confession.

I have not much time left wherein to best shape my story so as to be just to all, myself included. If I am not mistaken, the officers of the law are in hot chase of me, but my statement shall not be made to an earthly judge. The words of a man about to die may not be well chosen; they should at least be true. I will tell of events as nearly as possible in their sequence of time. If I leave gaps through haste or forgetfulness you will, from your own knowledge of the facts, readily fill them up once you are in possession of the salient features.

Mensmore and his sister were the friends of my early years. We played together as children. Gwendoline Mensmore was two years younger than I, and I well remember making love to her at the age of eleven. Her mother died when she was quite a baby, and her father married again, so her step-brother Albert is her junior by four years. I taught him how to ride and swim and play cricket, as my father's place in Surrey—we did not acquire the Yorkshire property until the death of my grandfather—adjoined the estate General Mensmore occupied after his retirement from the Army.

We children always called Gwendoline "Dick," to avoid the difficulty of her long-sounding name, I suppose, and I honestly believe that our respective parents entertained the idea that a marriage between us was quite a possible and natural thing. I went away to school at Brighton, and Mensmore, being a somewhat precocious lad, joined the same school before I left it. The head-master, the Rev. Septimus Childe, was an old friend of my father's, and when he wished to purchase a house at Putney—the terrible house which has figured in my dreams for the past three months as a Place of Skulls—my parents put pressure on my mother's trustees to make the transaction an easy one. Of course I knew it well. We regarded it in those early years as a town house, and always lived there during the season.

(To be continued.)

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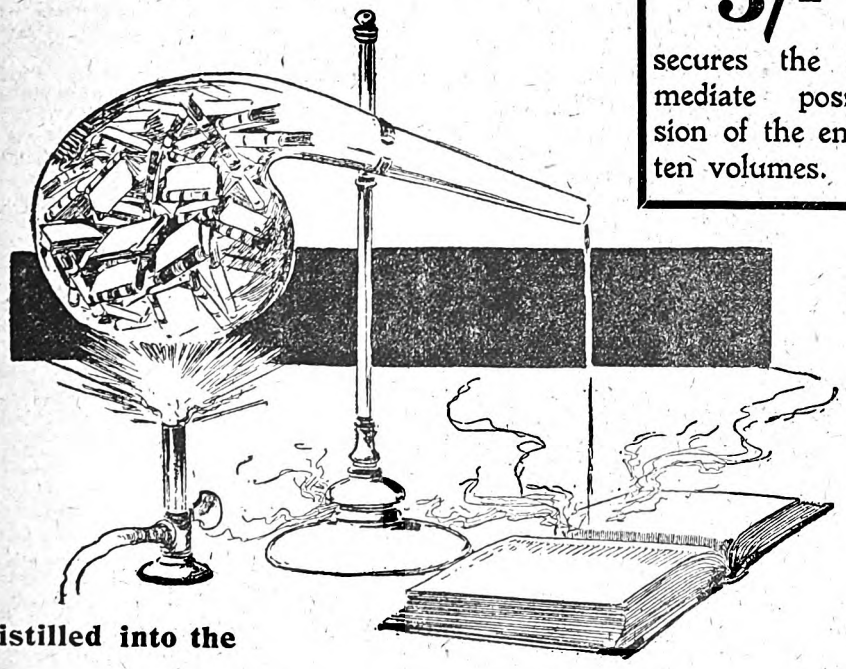

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

It is with the utmost pleasure that I perceive how quickly the revival of the "Editor's Page" has become a favourite with readers. Numbers of congratulatory letters have reached me, for which I am duly grateful. What I like mainly about these letters is the spirit of genuine friendship which seems to pervade them. There is nothing else so pleasing to an editor as to find that his readers, although personally unknown to him, are yet his most cordial friends at heart. I can assure everybody that the feeling is sincerely reciprocated.

An ounce of help is worth a hundredweight of sympathy, is an old saying. Well, I am glad to say I am receiving both from readers. The "ounces of help" are coming up with most generous overweight. In what way? Why, in the obtaining of new readers. My friends are recommending *Short Stories* to their acquaintances, which is the kindest thing they could do for me.

This reminds me that the present is an admirable time for this sort of recommendation. For in the course of a week or two we shall begin the publication of a new serial story.

This story is by Headon Hill, the well-known author of "The Peril of the Prince," "Beacon Fires," "By a Hair's Breadth," "Guilty Gold," and other famous novels. Our story is entitled:

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It is a good, strong, dramatic novel, full of exciting incidents, and entertaining from the first chapter to the last. Those who like good fiction should on no account miss it. As the demand will be very great it will be wise to order a copy beforehand.

"G. E. G."—Stage prompters have hitherto been drawn from the ranks of men, but a well-known London theatre has now a woman prompter. So far she is a success, as it has been found that her voice carries farther than a man's. The compass of a woman's voice being smaller, and the tone clearer and higher, it can be thrown farther than the deeper and more resonant voice of a male. Again, a woman's enunciation is better than a man's at any time; she speaks more distinctly.

Another field of labour in connection with the stage has been thrown open to women. The designing of costumes has been done by men up to the present time, mainly by London artists. A young lady who has been successful in designing many of the costumes for several dress pieces in London, and whose commissions for the designing of dresses for coming stage representations are numerous, is unselfish enough to say that young ladies desirous of following her would find plenty of scope and a large field where their services could be utilised. But they must have training.

Regarding our weekly Postcard Competition, there is a diversity of opinion. A good number of readers are in favour of reverting to the aforetime order of things, and having a special subject set each week, while others advocate the continuance of the present arrangement, which makes eligible any anecdote on any subject.

I shall do my best to meet everybody's pleasure by compromising the matter. Next week, therefore, I shall set one particular subject, and periodically repeat the experiment. This will be an additional competition, as the present one will be continued as usual.

"Mabel" is engaged to Dick. She has been engaged seven years, but never once in all that time has Dick ever asked her to name the day. Mabel is beginning to wonder if she will ever change her name. She is too bashful to ask Dick direct, and he seems impervious to hints. She asks me for advice.

Well, if I were you, "Mabel," I should just put the question to him either verbally or by letter. Seven years is quite long enough for Dick or any other man to have made up his mind, and it is only fair to you that he should declare his intentions definitely. Perhaps, if you sent him *Short Stories* with this paragraph marked, it might have the desired effect.

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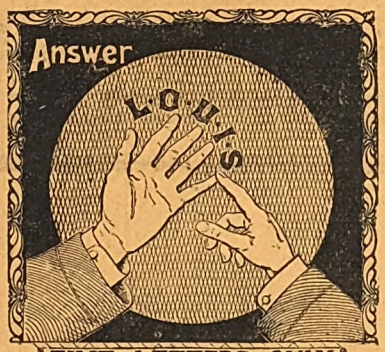

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No. 639.] For Week Ending March 30, 1901. [One Penny.

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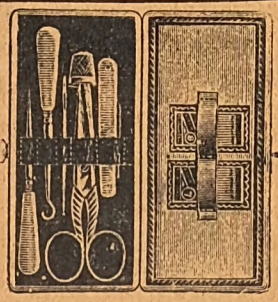

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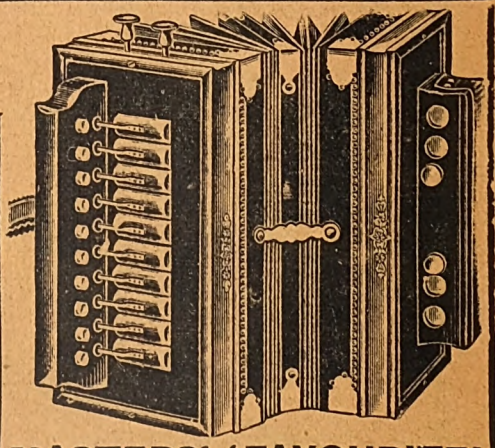

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 639.] For the Week Ending March 30th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

A Keeper of Secrets

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Being Days in the Professional Life of the late Mr. Hugo Pontifex, the Famous West-end Solicitor.

To those who had only met him casually in Society, the late Mr. Pontifex was a good-tempered mystery. Bluff, handsome, and, in spite of his middle-age, a little of a dandy, he seemed the last man in the world to deserve his reputation, which was that of the keenest, most audacious, and unerring of family lawyers. Fair-haired, and powerful as an athlete, his striking appearance was increased by his eyes, one of which was grey and one blue.

In reality, however, Hugo Pontifex had a wide and almost exclusively aristocratic practice. He seldom briefed a barrister, seldom set foot in a court of justice, but single handed he hunted down, captured, and safely buried mystery after mystery of terrible import to Mayfair and Belgravia.

An expert in strangling scandal, he lived a life of enthralling interest, and died a rich man. When his executors went through his papers they found nothing to satisfy their curiosity, though plenty to excite it. Hugo Pontifex knew the value of fire—and the dangers of ink. But from time to time he related to the writer, who enjoyed a certain measure of his confidence, the incidents which form the basis of the following stories. In speaking of these strange fragments of drama, Mr. Pontifex himself employed fictitious names, the present author being left to guess vainly at the identity of the genuine actors.

THE PUNISHMENT OF MAJOR MEREDITH.

As a rule, Mr. Pontifex lunched at an exclusive club in Pall Mall, where he was known as a clever sportsman, a genial companion, and a brilliant talker on every topic except those of law and crime, the subjects in connection with which his singular reputation had been won.

Once, and only once, was Mr. Pontifex drawn into a professional interview within the walls of his club, and that was on the occasion when he was consulted by Norman Meredith upon a matter strangely involving both that young Oxonian's life and happiness.

The great lawyer was given at times to enjoying his afternoon cigar in silence, and a luxuriously-padded corner of a certain fine smoking-room, near the War Office, was for long Mr. Pontifex's chosen lounge. Here he would sit over his cup of black coffee, a lithe and thoughtful figure, watching the smoke wreaths as they drifted from his lips to veil irregularly his glittering eyes.

It was upon such a reverie that Norman Meredith, a comparatively new member of the club—he had joined it on leaving his college at Oxford—ventured to intrude. He was a frank, good-looking Englishman, still a trifle youthful, and Mr. Pontifex was disarmed by the nervous apology with which he took a seat beside the reflective solicitor.

"Will you forgive me, Mr. Pontifex," said Norman Meredith, simply, "if I ask you to accept me as a client and to give me some advice upon a—a rather unpleasant affair. You do not know more of me than my name, it is true, and these are not your office-hours, but I must leave town almost immediately and an impulse to seek your aid came over me as I passed and saw you sitting there. Of course, I have heard much of you and your, may I say, mysterious talents."

Mr. Pontifex smiled.

"You are a born diplomatist, Mr. Meredith," he replied; "you flatter me and whet my curiosity in a breath. Well, and what can I do for you?"

His would-be client produced from the breast-pocket of a morning coat a small leather case and handed it, open, to the lawyer. It contained a delicate miniature of a girl on the verge of womanhood—a charming girl, almost a beautiful woman. The face was sweet and loyal—Mr. Pontifex, a shrewd student of the human countenance, was favourably impressed by it.

"That is the lady I hope to marry," observed Norman Meredith, sadly; "you will see, I fancy, Mr. Pontifex, that I am not the victim of any foolish infatuation. She is, as it happens, of my own station, and as good as she is pretty. Alas, others than I have succumbed to her innocent attractions. I have narrowly escaped falling a victim to them in a double sense; Mr. Pontifex, my most determined rival is my nearest relative—my uncle, Major Meredith, and of late he has repeatedly, though secretly, attempted my life."

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The lawyer glanced about him. The smoking-room was by no means crowded; their quarter of the apartment was deserted, and Norman Meredith had lowered his voice. Satisfied of their privacy, Mr. Pontifex turned towards his client.

"You are a man of education and intelligence, Mr. Meredith," he said curtly. "I suppose you have satisfied yourself of the truth of this terrible allegation."

"Naturally," was the answer. "Mr. Pontifex, I have guessed for some months that my uncle was in love with Dorothy Carruthers, and I regretted the rivalry. But I did not dream of attributing to it the series of accidents that befel me, though, considered together, they were significant enough.

His jaw set as he noticed their delicious absorption in themselves.

"When out shooting, my uncle's gun exploded at a stile, the charge just missing my head and blowing a keeper's hat off. Again, I was mounting into his dog-cart—he had suggested driving me to the station—when he loosed the reins, and the mare, a spirited brute, started forward, knocking me down and all but sending the wheel over me."

Mr. Pontifex nodded gravely; either of the mishaps described is, or should be, rare with a country gentleman.

"Then," added Norman Meredith, "there was an unaccountable fire at Caneton House, my uncle's place, in the suite below mine, and by which I was almost suffocated. Finally, a horse that he gave me for a birthday present proved a bolter, and nothing but a lucky leap saved me from sharing in an appaling smash-up. Yet it was not till I discovered my uncle as the author of a diabolical trap especially laid for my unsuspecting feet, that I realised the danger to which my love for Dollie had exposed me."

"Go on," said the lawyer, for his client had paused to contemplate the vivacious portrait of Miss Carruthers.

"I beg your pardon," responded the young Oxonian, putting away the case blushingly. "At Caneton House, you must understand, we have a pretentious dancing-hall with a gallery round all four sides. Beyond this is a seldom-used wing, and in order to cross to the wing without following the circuit of the gallery, the hall is crossed by a kind of telescoping bridge. On high days and holidays this can be withdrawn, to leave the lofty sweep of the hall unbroken. Ordinarily, it is extended and locked in position. You comprehend?"

"Perfectly," said Mr. Pontifex. His cigar had gone out; he had begun to play with his sapphire ring.

"After the fire of which I spoke," pursued his client, "I moved into the wing beyond the dancing-hall, and consequently had to cross the bridge—in darkness—each night. Going to my room late one evening, I happened while on the bridge to strike a match and relight my cigarette. Tossing it down it passed apparently through the bridge, and flickered to the gloomy depths of the hall below. The bridge was open at its further end!"

The solicitor whistled softly. Otherwise, he made no comment.

"I knew that my uncle kept the key of the telescoping arrangement," said Norman Meredith, "and in an instant it flashed upon me that he wished to murder me. Concluding that he would be on the watch to close the bridge after I had met my intended doom, I had recourse to strategy, and, allowing my cigarette to go out and muttering a loud curse upon my last match, I retraced my steps. As I passed over the gallery proper I will swear that I saw my uncle hiding in the shadow."

The speaker studied Mr. Pontifex's expression—it told him nothing of the solicitor's mind.

"I stayed in the library till dawn," continued Mr. Pontifex's client; "and then returned to find the bridge closed. The same day I left Caneton House and travelled to London, where I have remained since. But there is a ball to-night at Caneton House and Dollie will be there. I cannot leave my uncle in sole possession of the field. I am going back, possibly to be caught at last in a successful snare. On the very point of departure I caught sight of you and wondered if you could help me. I have no evidence against my uncle, not even that of jealousy. I am not admittedly engaged to Dollie, nor has he proposed for her. His attempts to destroy me sound, as I relate them, like the sick fancies of my own brain. Yet I feel to see Dollie again I am risking my life."

Mr. Pontifex rose and shook his loose frock-coat into order.

"You shall go back Caneton House," he decided; "and you shall not risk your life very seriously, that is, if you will take me with you—not ostensibly as your lawyer, but as your friend."

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"With pleasure," cried his client; "but what will you do there?"

The solicitor's brows wrinkled over his peculiar eyes, and he laid a strong palm on the other's shoulder.

"Wait and see," was his advice. "At the moment, permit me to send for my dressing-case and a bag; I keep a travelling outfit at the office." And he strolled out of the smoking-room to dispatch a messenger.

* * * * *

The early evening of the October day found him, together with Norman Meredith, in the heart of Bedfordshire.

Caneton House was a medley of buildings, of which, as is frequent among large and rambling country residences, only one block was properly occupied. Next to this particular portion of Caneton House stood the large dancing-hall described by Norman Meredith, and, beyond it, the practically disused wing in which he had taken up his abode after his escape from the fire of which he had told Mr. Pontifex.

This much of the geography of the old mansion, his client pointed out to the solicitor as they walked round it before entering. The dancing-hall was ablaze with light, and through the tall windows floated the sound of servants' voices. The completing touches were being put to the preparations for the evening's entertainment.

The lawyer was anxious to obtain a glimpse of Major Meredith and begged to be introduced without delay. Norman Meredith sought out his uncle and, with a creditable degree of dissimulation, escorted him to the library, where he made him acquainted with the lawyer.

"Delighted to know any friend of Norman's," said the Major effusively.

He was a big man, with a thin iron-grey thatch, a full moustache, a thick neck, a gaze half-bullying, half-shifty.

Mr. Pontifex assumed a jovial, sporting air, and Major Meredith grew quickly persuaded that his nephew's companion was a perfectly familiar type of visitor.

But when he dismissed them to dress, Mr. Pontifex noticed that his glance followed his nephew stealthily, and that he chuckled to himself.

He was unmistakably pleased at his young kinsman's reappearance.

Their toilet finished, Norman Meredith showed the lawyer from corridor to corridor of the vast residence, emerging on the gallery of the dancing-hall, in which the Major had already begun to receive his guests of the night.

"This," said Norman Meredith, halting in the middle of one of the longer sides; "is where the bridge shoots out, as you see, it is drawn back now to leave the vista of the hall clear. The apparatus for working it is inclosed in this box, the key of which my uncle keeps."

Mr. Pontifex leant over the balastrade and calculated the distance to the floor beneath.

"It is only twenty feet or so," he concluded; "a light weight like you could swing from the ledge and drop the remainder, say twelve feet, easily. Of course to drop without warning, and probably head-first, would mean death or crippling."

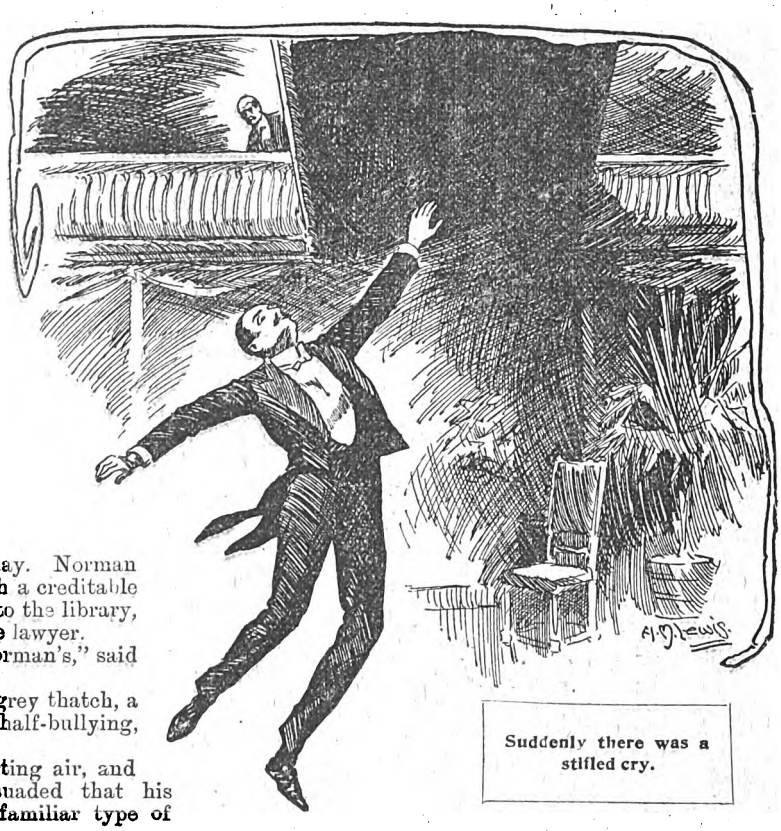
He stopped abruptly.

"Will they replace the bridge to-night?"

"Oh, yes," his client assured him; "I, at least, will sleep in the far wing, as you may, if you choose."

"I must do nothing of the sort," said Mr. Pontifex peremptorily, "get me estab ished as closely as you can to the last corridor through which we came just now."

"You have an idea," Norman Meredith told him, excitedly; "what is it?"



Suddenly there was a stifled cry.

The solicitor frowned.

"I never confess to ideas, Meredith," he declared drily; "until I have translated them into actions."

He surveyed critically the hall beneath—it was filling rapidly.

"Look," he added; "is not that fair lady who is being welcomed by your uncle, the original of your miniature?"

"It *is* Dollie!" said his impulsive client. "Excuse me a moment, Mr. Pontifex; I will snatch a few words with her and then rejoin you."

"Very good!" assented the lawyer calmly; "I will sit up here like poor Jack's cherub and admire. Positively the sight of Miss Carruthers in the flesh makes me sympathise with your uncle."

Norman Meredith, disregarding this piece of banter, hurried off, and Mr. Pontifex, litting a chair to the gallery railing, pondered the scene before him. Dorothy Carruthers was indeed a beautiful girl, and the Major

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did not seen inclined to yield her to his nephew. The gleam that shot from his steely pupils as she accepted the latter's arm and moved away, laughing, was seized by the keen scrutiny of Mr. Pontifex—there was in it an unmistakable passion of hatred. Luckily, no one but the solicitor appreciated the fact, and the next instant the Major was his bowing, simpering self once more.

"A dangerous man!" murmured Mr. Pontifex; "he must be dealt with promptly—and firmly."

Having registered this statement, he abandoned his chair and strolled down into the hall. Norman Meredith and Dorothy Carruthers were waltzing—they were a handsome couple, and obviously in love. Each whispered to each as they danced; a rosy glow flushed the girl's happy face. Mr. Pontifex made his way to Major Meredith.

"Congratulations, Major," he said; "you know how to do these things, and no mistake; I could imagine myself in London instead of the country. And, by the bye. I'm afraid Meredith forgot to say that he and I are only on a flying visit—we must see town again to-morrow."

The Major's features twitched.

"I am sorry you contemplate such a short stay," he answered absently—his gaze had settled on his nephew and Dorothy Carruthers. His jaw set as he noted their delicious absorption in themselves. Mr. Pontifex added a trivial remark and left his host with graceful ease. At the end of the waltz he secured Norman Meredith for a hasty intimation.

"You and I leave Caneton House to-morrow," he said briefly, "don't trouble about explanations, they will do later. Meantime, introduce me to some nice people; even a lawyer's toes get tapping to such music as this."

His young client laughed, apologised, and did as he was bidden. Mr. Pontifex speedily showed himself one of the best waltzers in the company, and with an ample choice of partners the night flew pleasantly for the solicitor.

When he saw Norman Meredith next, the final carriage had rolled away down the drive and, but for attendants, the dancing-hall was empty. Up in the gallery a manservant was winding a little steel crank and the curious telescoping bridge of Caneton House was extending itself across the wide apartment. The lawyer and his client watched it mutely until it had spanned the hall; then Mr. Pontifex touched the latter's elbow.

"Come and have a cigar in the winter-garden," he proposed; "but first say good-night to your uncle. And, oh, just mention that you intend to lounge and smoke for an hour before you go to bed."

Norman Meredith acted on the recommendation, somewhat puzzled as to the lawyer's motive.

"You arranged for me to sleep anywhere but in that confounded wing?" queried Mr. Pontifex, as they gained the winter-garden.

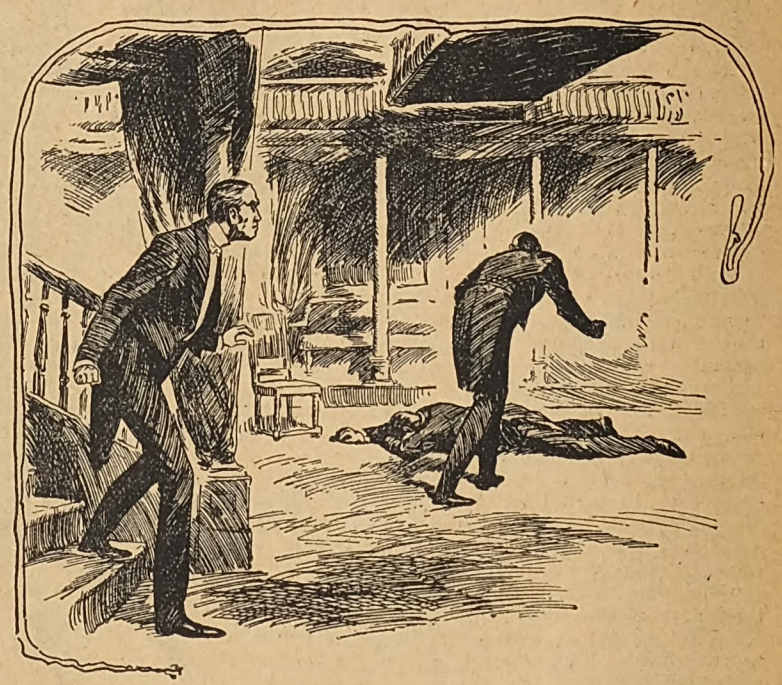
"Most particularly," said his client, "but I can't imagine what you're driving at."

"It is not a very difficult riddle," responded the lawyer; "you and I have announced our intention of returning to town to-morrow, you have rendered your uncle desperate by your flirtation with Miss Carruthers this evening, and in an hour you are about to cross that bridge—alone, for I sleep on this side of the hall. It is unlikely that you will be seized, as you were on a lucky occasion, with a fancy to retrace your steps."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Norman Meredith. "You believe——"

"That the Major will set the same trap for you," said Mr. Pontifex. "I am sure of it. But let us have our cigars, and allow him all the time he can require."

They penetrated deeper into the dusty quiet of the winter garden, and Mr. Pontifex unfolded his instructions.



"Coward! traitor!" vibrated Mr. Pontifex's slow syllables.

"If all falls out as I expect," he pursued, "you must walk boldly to the gap, bend down, touch the extremity of the bridge, swing to your arm's length, and drop on your feet. Then double up, fall in a heap, sham death, and leave the rest to me. I will see to your uncle."

"You are a daring plotter, Mr. Pontifex," said his client, astonished.

"Am I?" asked the solicitor; "I do but anticipate how men will act under certain circumstances. I cause those circumstances to arise, and having done so, stand by and watch. That is my method—interesting, but not complex."

He puffed at his Havana till it shone redly in the gloom, got out his gold hunter, and, by the radiance of the cigar-tip, examined the dial.

"An hour to wait," he said, and sat down under a tall fern-tree.

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Norman Meredith will remember for many years that hour's talk in the winter-garden of Caneton House. Mr. Pontifex, as has been hinted, was, when in the mood, a fascinating talker, and his young client felt the fascination—the sixty minutes might have been ten. At length Mr. Pontifex rose.

"Come," he said, and together they passed out of the lofty glass building into the corridors of Caneton House.

Not far from the gallery of the dancing-hall the lawyer stopped.

"I must make no noise," he murmured; "as for you, walk firmly, even loudly. Pass boldly on to the bridge, and if, as I expect, it proves open, act in the fashion I described to you."

Norman Meredith obeyed. Entering the species of high balcony around the hall he perceived that he was alone, Mr. Pontifex had halted.

The solicitor paused in the corridor that gave upon the gallery. He was certain that he could see, in a shadowy recess just ahead, a vague form which leant out to watch the figure of Norman Meredith. Mr. Pontifex stole up inch by inch.

Suddenly there was a stifled cry, an interval and then a thud. His young client had found the solicitor's prophecy correct, and had carried out his advice. He had precipitated himself skilfully to the pavement beneath.

The indefinite form, on which Mr. Pontifex had his eye, crept out and moved to the part of the gallery where the telescoping gear was fixed. There was a faint creak or two and a slight jar. The bridge had evidently been closed,

The lawyer held his breath. What would the Major (for Mr. Pontifex had no doubt that the vague form was his host's) do now? Straining his vision, the solicitor saw a dim outline tip-toeing along the gallery, towards the angle from which a flight of stairs reached the hall below. Mr. Pontifex followed.

To the bottom level of the large apartment he tracked the gliding shape and pursued it almost to the spot where, in a ray of the waning moonlight that pierced a ground-floor window, Norman Meredith lay in an ugly mass, face downwards and apparently senseless. By the pale radiance that glimmered about him, Mr. Pontifex was able to assure himself that the unconscious subject of his pursuit was indeed the Major.

In a screening patch of profound gloom the solicitor stayed his course, and peered after the other as he stooped over the prostrate body of Norman Meredith. The moonbeams dwelt on the Major's features; they were distorted and ashen. He bent over to touch the seeming corpse, but shrank from it.

Mr. Pontifex's client lay perfectly motionless, the lawyer—delighted with the success of his plot—was meditating a leap upon the Major. It would need little more than a swift *resumé* of Norman Meredith's suspicions, and a brief account of the lawyer's device, to demonstrate to the imagined murderer that he was henceforth in the power of his fancied victim. How he would stare when the supposed dead sprang up to bear witness to the fact!

Mr. Pontifex started. An audacious idea had struck him. He shivered at it himself, but executed it with characteristic promptitude. In low, sibilant tones he spoke distinctly a couple of singular sentences. The words came to the Major's ear and arrested his attention.

"Coward, traitor, murderer!" vibrated Mr. Pontifex's slow syllables; "a curse be on you now and hereafter! Norman Meredith, arise and haunt your slayer!"

Astonished beyond measure at this unexpected and mysterious order, in which, nevertheless, he recognised Mr. Pontifex's voice, the lawyer's young client lifted his head and then sat up. The moonbeams lent his countenance a ghastly, pallid hue.

A fearful shriek rang to the roof of the dancing-hall. Major Meredith covered his face and collapsed, shuddering violently. He began to chatter to himself, breaking occasionally into an unearthly howl.

"In Heaven's name, what shall we do?" whispered Norman Meredith. "He will rouse the entire household."

"Quite so," said Mr. Pontifex, contentedly; "see, here come servants and candles already."

The lawyer was right. A terrified footman, in trousers and a blanket, had thrust a taper over the gallery balustrade. The Major pointed at the light and gibbered.

"Is someone being killed down there?" cried the footman, tremulously.

Mr. Pontifex strode across the hall and looked up.

"It is your master, Major Meredith," he called sternly. "We found him wandering about and screaming. Bring lights, quickly."

And in the chill dawn of the October morning, the dancing-hall was re-illuminated, while his nephew and a bewildered valet led the Major to his bed-room—a shrieking lunatic.

Long after the Major had been consigned to a private asylum and Norman Meredith, married to the charming Dorothy, was administrator and practical owner of the Caneton estates, the latter put a daring question to Mr. Pontifex, who was spending a week-end in Bedfordshire.

"Did you really mean to unhinge my uncle's mind?" he asked, anxiously; "of course, I know it was the best thing that could have happened, for he undoubtedly deserved the gallows. But I have never been quite certain as to whether it was an accident or not."

The solicitor wrinkled his brows over his glittering eyes and smiled to himself.

"I am not sure," he said, drily; "it was more in the nature of an experiment."

And that was all the information Norman Meredith could get out of him.

No Better Cure!

PHYSICIAN to PATIENT. "Yes, sir, there is not the slightest doubt that you are suffering from a severe depression caused by a sharp liver attack."

PATIENT. "And what remedy would you suggest, Doctor?"

PHYSICIAN. "Well, sir, my strongest recommendation to you is to get a copy of Mr. Arnold Golsworthy's merrily irresponsible book, "The New Master," and read a chapter or two daily, and that will soon put you right. I cannot think of a better cure for anybody who is suffering from the 'blues.'"

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A Comedietta, by H. Goldsmith Whitton.*

CHARACTERS.

AUBREY DE VERE. . . . . OLGA LANGUISH.

SCENE:—*Vestibule of Hotel.*

AUBREY: Well, of all the stupid out-of-the-way holes, commend me to this beastly place. It's been raining now for days, and there's absolutely nothing to be done but eat and smoke, and there's not a single soul worth talking to, except Miss Languish, and she's always monopolised by that sickening idiot Thompson. What's a fellow to do? I'll go and see if the mail's in. [*Exit* AUBREY, *right.*

(*Enter* OLGA, *left.*)

OLGA: That Thompson man bores me to death; there's no escaping from him. Rain outside and bores indoors. What's a girl to do? There's only one man in the place who looks as if he knew anything, and that's Mr. de Vere; but that horrid Mamie Saunders is always running after him, and I can only get in about three words with him. Whenever I begin to talk with him, she breaks in with her silly giggle (*imitating*), "You have no idea, Mr. de Vere, how charming the tomatoes look in the greenhouse! (*Giggles.*) Miss Languish, I think I heard your Aunt asking for you. It's too bad, dear, that you can't come with us to the greenhouse." Nasty, spiteful old thing! She must be thirty-five if she's a day, and old enough to know better. I suppose I ought to fetch my work. I'll keep my fingers busy, anyway. [*Exit* OLGA, *right.*

(*Enter both from opposite sides, he reading, she with work on arm, reading letter.*)

AUBREY: Absolutely nothing in the paper to-day.

OLGA: Only a tiresome dressmaker's bill.

[*Collide in middle of stage.*

AUBREY: I beg your pardon.

OLGA: It's nothing, I assure you; don't mention it.

[*Seat themselves far apart. He pretends to read paper, but looks at her, and she pretends to work, but glances at him. Their eyes meet, and both look away. Repeat.*

AUBREY: Very wet weather, Miss Languish.

OLGA: Yes, very.

AUBREY: Are you enjoying your stay here?

OLGA: Oh, immensely.

AUBREY: It's more than I am, then.

OLGA: Well, it is rather dull in wet weather.

AUBREY: Why can't people do something? It's so stupid here; everybody sits around, the women talking about each other.

OLGA: And the men smoking like chimneys—such bad cigars, too.

AUBREY: (*Groans.*) Oh! (*Goes on reading.*)

OLGA: It is stupid. (*Short pause.*)

AUBREY: Why can't they get up something? Could we not act a piece or something of the sort?

OLGA: That's not a bad idea, but where are we to find a play? There's nothing in the library but *Hamlet.*

AUBREY: We'd hardly be up to Shakespeare, I'm afraid.

OLGA: Don't you think Miss Saunders would make a fine Ophelia? (*Face.*)

AUBREY: I think your friend Mr. Thompson would make an ideal Hamlet. (*Face.*) Hamlet should be played by a fat man. Ha, ha, ha! I'll tell you what we'll do, Miss Languish, why bother about Shakespeare, *we* might write a play ourselves.

OLGA: What fun! I wonder if we could? Let's do it.

AUBREY: First thing is to find out who can act. Let me see. There is the treacle man's family. I don't think they'd do. I don't think they're classy enough.

OLGA: They're too awful for words—they're always looking for h's and picking them up at the wrong

* For permission to perform this comedietta write, "EDITOR, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C."

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times. I heard the little fat one say this morning, "Hamy, can I 'elp you to some beggs?"

Aubrey: I admit they *are* bounders. Then there's the De Ponsonby-Smythes. They're above that sort of thing.

Olga: Yes, it would take hot irons to thaw them.

Aubrey: What about the o'd professor?

Olga: Oh, he's so dreadfully absent-minded he'd forget his part and start an argument with the prompter on the origin of destiny. I suppose the learned Miss Gookins with the spectacles wouldn't condescend to act?

Aubrey: Brrrrrr! I'd be afraid to ask her.

(Olga *laughs.*)

Aubrey: The old General, eh?

Olga: He'd be perfectly unmanageable at the rehearsals, his temper is vile.

Aubrey: What do you think of young Simpson? Wouldn't he do for a walking gentleman?

Olga: Walking stick, you mean. That bashful boy, why he blushes when anyone even looks at him, he'd sink through the floor with fright when his turn came to speak.

Aubrey: Well, of course, there's your friend, Mr. Thompson. I don't think he'll do exactly.

Olga: No, I don't think he would. (*Pause.*) I suppose you'll give Miss Saunders a good part?

Aubrey: Oh no; leave her out.

Olga: There's only that old lady and her companion.

Aubrey: You mean the lunatic and her keeper?

Olga (*laughing*): Oh, they're out of the question.

Aubrey: Well, it comes to this Miss Languish, there's only you and I left. Perhaps it's better to confine ourselves to a small cast and do the thing really well. Let's set to work. You sit down there, and I'll fetch some paper. Here's pen and ink. (*Opens drawer.*) Oh, here's some paper, this will do. Let me see, you want a penwiper.

Olga: Never mind.

Aubrey: You *are* uncomfortable, let me get you a footstool, and a cushion for your back.

Olga: Thanks. Have *you* everything now? Then let's begin, (*Both sit biting the ends of their pens and look blankly at each other.*)

Aubrey: Have you thought of anything?

Olga: No, have you?

Aubrey: Not yet. (*Both groan.*) Of course, I have several ideas, but I'm afraid they'd hardly suit; one must be very careful with a mixed audience.

Olga: Yes, that's true.

Aubrey: You know I think we'll have to fall back on a simple love story. Nobody could object to that. Don't you think that's the best idea?

Olga: Love story, ye-es. It's not a subject I know very much about——

Aubrey: I'm sorry I can't believe you.

Olga: What do you mean? (*Indignantly.*)

Aubrey: Well, it's not for me to make any remarks, but it seems to me that—well, of course——

Olga: I never flirt.

Aubrey: Of course, you can call it by another name, but when other fellows cannot get a word in edgeways—I—we—one would naturally suppose that you——

Olga: Oh, you mean Mr. Thompson. He's very nice.

Aubrey: So it would appear.

Olga: Well, you needn't talk, "Glass houses and stones," you know. "Have you seen the charming tomatoes this morning, Mr. de Vere." Was it *only* the tomatoes?

Aubrey: How absurd. Miss Saunders is old enough to be my mother.

Olga: To tell you the truth Mr. Thompson is very tiresome.

Aubrey: Oh, I'm glad you think so.

Olga: Are you, really? (*Recollecting.*) Oh, I say, we have not written a word yet.

Aubrey: Oh! yes, I forgot; we must get to work. Um! Ah! I've got an idea!

Olga (*eagerly*): What is it?

Aubrey: No, it won't do. Wait a minute, yes—yes—no. There—I thought of something, but I can't think what it was.

Olga: That's too bad. Let me see. Oh! I do feel so stupid.

They collide in middle of stage.

Aubrey (*triumphantly*): Hold a minute; here I have it; it is splendid, simply magnificent, just what we want, and, if we act it, why, it's sure to be a success. Don't you think it will do?

Olga: What will do?

Aubrey: Why the plot, of course. We shall have a tragedy in one act. Two disconsolate lovers, just like you and I. I mean you and I are just like two disconsolate lovers—no, not that—two people who—oh! *you* know what I mean—a handsome youth and a beautiful girl, resolve to commit suicide. They meet by chance in the topmost tower of a baronial castle, having decided to fling themselves over the balcony into the cruel lake below.

Olga: What for?

Aubrey: Don't you understand? They are tired of this hollow mockery termed life. I can see them as they stand, hand in hand, and take the fatal plunge into the limpid waters of the pellucid lake.

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Olga: Oh, I don't think that would do at all. How could we manage the lake? There's only a leaky bath in the hotel, and it would be silly to see two people standing in that. Besides, what could I wear. Of course, I could put on that bathing-dress I had at Dieppe last summer, and let my hair down, although it would come out of curl. That might do, but if you were wearing a tall hat and a frock coat, I think people would laugh at us.

Aubrey: I don't see where the fun comes in. I think the idea is very poetic. Can *you* suggest anything?

Olga: They might both take poison together. It would thrill the audience to see the deadly drug gradually take effect.

Olga: Well, I object to kissing.

Aubrey: It strikes me they would look more like two gasping fish out of water.

Olga (*coldly*): Do you think so? I think it would be a very pretty death.

Aubrey: What if they both blew their brains out together?

Olga: Oh, no, that's too messy! Besides, where are we to get the brains from? (*Pause.*) No, I think that the best plan is for the girl not to die at all.

Aubrey: Then you would stand by and see me die alone?

Olga: Oh, no, I don't mean that. You see, I might forget to have anything to kill myself with, and I would go out to get a carving knife. Meanwhile, you would have had a fit and died in great agony. Of course, you'd have to keep up the dying long enough to give me time to change my dress, and then I could come in wearing a smart, half-mourning costume and pretend to cry over you.

Aubrey: I'm afraid people would think that rather selfish on your part. I've an idea. Why not let us live and fall in love with each other?

Olga: Oh, that would be nice—I mean in the play.

Aubrey: Yes, of course, only in the play.

Olga: Can't there be some dying, anyhow? It's too bad to give it up entirely, it would make such a good scene.

Aubrey: Ye—es, it might if you'd die with me.

Olga: It would be more dramatic if I watched *you* die; the agony of my grief would be so nice to act.

Aubrey: Then you would really care if I died?

Olga: I should care very much—I mean, don't you think she ought to feel very sorry?

Aubrey: Of course she would. But they might fall in love anyhow, and there might be a touching farewell. He with her hand in his, and she, forgetting all but the awful fact that he's to be taken from her, throws her arms round his neck.

Olga (*horrified*): Oh, must I?

Aubrey: Yes, he would take her hand, like this (*suits action to words*) and tell her of his undying love. Her arms would be gradually stealing round his neck; you must do it now or I shall lose my inspiration.

Olga (*meekly*): Like this—in the play, of course.

Aubrey: Yes, otherwise I can't go on.

Olga: If it is necessary for the sake of the play, I suppose I can sacrifice my own feelings.

Aubrey: Don't say that, you don't really mind much, do you?

Olga (*hesitatingly*): Well, ye—es, naturally, it seems strange; but, of course, we're only rehearsing.

Aubrey: Then he says, "My darling, tell me you can care for me, and I will live for your sake. My life shall be yours, and you will make existence exquisite from henceforth, or if you say me nay, you will drive me to desperate deeds."

Olga: But will they understand what you mean?

Aubrey: Yes, why not? "Oh, fairest flower in nature's field, I will live for thee. I have loved you since first we met, loved you with all my heart and all my soul. Can you love me just a little, dear one?"

Olga (*slowly*): I—I—perhaps——would she say that?

Aubrey: And then they kiss.

Olga: No, they don't.

Aubrey: To preserve the dramatic sequence it is absolutely necessary.

Olga: It doesn't seem necessary to me.

Aubrey (*indignant*): But have you ever seen a proposal without a kiss?

Olga: That depends, and this is only on the stage.

Aubrey: But we must make it true to life for all that.

Olga: Well, I object to kissing.

Aubrey: That's so like a woman, you say you object but you give no reason.

Olga: Men are so stupid, they never understand.

Aubrey (*decidedly*): Let us be in again. I say—*he* says—to you—to *her*, I mean, "Fairest blossom on nature's tree, can you love me a little, only just a little?"

Olga: I can, Aubrey.

(*They kiss.*)

Aubrey: Olga, my darling, you have made me the happiest man on earth. My own dear little woman, I cannot believe it. It's too good to be true. You really love me.

Olga: Of course I do, Aubrey, I *am* so happy.

(*They kiss. Dinner gong heard.*)

Olga (*very loud*): What about the play?

Aubrey: Never mind the play, it is only for private performance.

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THE LION'S WARS

The New Zealand War.

1860-5.

WHEN the traders of the Southern seas, some sixty years ago, following in the footsteps of the missionaries, visited New Zealand, they soon saw that the scarcity of reptiles and wild beasts, the sparseness of the native population, and above all the mildness of the climate, and the fertility of the soil, rendered the country admirably suited for colonization.

In due course, the colonists arrived and then, as settlers have always done, came into collision with the natives over the land.

The early settlers in New Zealand were confronted with greater difficulties than those which beset their brethren of Australia.

The Maoris, as the natives of New Zealand were called, although never numbering more than 150,000, were a splendid race. Physically, the men were as big as ourselves, and their mental aptitude was so great that they soon acquired the practices and habits of civilized people.

In 1840 the Maoris were cannibals and practised slavery. In 1860 they wore European clothes, lived in houses like the settlers, drank tea, smoked tobacco, brought their disputes for settlement into our courts of law, were obedient to our rule, treated us with respect, and were never happier than when conversing with the British on such subjects as trade, ships, flour, racing, ploughs, horses, cattle, and wheat, but they never touched on land. They hated that subject, because they saw we had fixed longing eyes on their country.

In 1859 the value of the produce exported by the colonists was only £500,000, and, as the population at that time exceeded 59,000 souls, this was thought much too little.

So we raised our price and prevailed on some of the natives to sell. But this soon gave rise to grave disputes.

The Maoris loved the gold we gave them, but the tastes engendered by civilization being expensive, the money soon went and they found themselves angrily eyeing the white man who owned the land.

As all the natives were interested in the soil, some of the tribes set up a claim that their assent was necessary to make the sale binding.

Something similar to this had existed in Scotland in the old clanship days. The custom may have worked well in Scotland, but the settlers, having to pay cash down, naturally refused to recognise the collective ownership of tribes.

Quarrels led to fighting, and as the young bloods were anxious to try a fall with the whites, some of the tribes rose in rebellion.

At the outbreak of the war at Taranaki in 1860 the Waikatos held aloof from the revolt for nearly a year, not from want of sympathy with the natives, but because they possessed a large amount of property which they were unwilling to sacrifice.

The Waikatos must have had a shop-keeping instinct equal to our own for they had many flour mills at work, driven by wind and water.

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They ground the wheat which they grew, and sold it in Auckland, and the overseers engaged to look after their businesses were nearly always British.

But the Waikatos were drawn into the war at last, and the fighting then became general. These Waikatos proved themselves to be the most formidable of all our opponents.

Still no one anticipated that the natives would be able to withstand our troops, especially as the mode of warfare practised by the Maoris was well-known to the Government at home.

In the New Zealand war of 1844, although they exhibited much bravery and skill, we contrived, after much hard fighting, to subdue them, and capture Honi-Heki and Raupasaha, two great chiefs.

This experience did, or should, have given us such a knowledge of the country that it was generally supposed that the new war would be of short duration, instead of which it dragged on for years.

In many respects, the New Zealand war of 1861-3 greatly resembled the Boer war of 1899-1901. In neither instance could the authorities provide the generals with reliable maps of the country and in neither case had they any idea of the strength of the opposing forces. Notwithstanding the war of 1844 the War Office believed the country was flat, possibly because the sea coast was level. Whereas, mountainous New Zealand was most difficult to traverse covered as it then was with almost inaccessible forests.

Vague allusions were made about the war in Parliament in 1862 but as the Ministry regarded the Maoris as a race of weak and unwarlike Polynesians, reinforcements were not deemed necessary. Munitions of war, however, were.

So they sent a quantity of camp stores in every way lsuitable for a European campaign, but certain to be of ittle service against an agile foe fighting in a country singularly adapted for guerilla warfare. Our troops wanted light field pieces, and handy commissariat waggons, instead of which they were sent heavy Armstrong guns and monstrous waggons.

The military authorities in New Zealand exhibited even more ignorance. Some years before they had formed a force of Maori police drilled and trained to the use of fire-arms. There was no difficulty in obtaining recruits, but there was in keeping them. As soon as a Maori considered himself efficient he deserted, and his place was taken by another who also disappeared as soon as we had taught him how to shoot straight.

The colonists had over and over again warned the authorities that the entire Maori nation were passing through the police force and that mischief would come of it, but to no purpose.

It was the same when the war broke out. The British officers scouted the idea of the natives they had trained being able to fight, and persisted in regarding them as a miserable lot of niggers. General Pratt who was placed in command of the forces, held similar views, but he was soon undeceived.

The first brush showed that the niggers were splendid fighters. The two forces came into collision. We charged of course after the usual volley, expecting the Maoris would run, but they did nothing of the sort. They waited till we were only ten feet away and then poured a deadly volley. We lost so many men in this fight that General Pratt resigned and returned to Australia.

As none of the Commanders who succeeded him displayed the slightest ability, and as our men, moreover, were being constantly lured into ambuscades, the Government reluctantly came to the conclusion that something must be done besides sending unsuitable artillery.

The war had already cost the country over three millions, and as continental nations were beginning to jeer at our inability to subdue a few savages the prestige of the country was considered to be involved. The Maoris must, therefore, be crushed and orders were sent to this effect.

Sir George Grey, the Governor of New Zealand and one of our greatest colonial governors, thought differently and made a great attempt to secure peace.

In 1863 he issued a proclamation declaring that as the Government knew nothing of the facts connected with the purchase of the land which had caused the war the transaction was null and void. The Maoris instantly regarded this manifesto as a sign of fear and refused to submit.

General Cameron was, therefore, instructed to crush the rebellion as speedily as possible, but he fared no better than his predecessors. Needless to say he also made the mistake of despising his foe. But his contempt for the Maoris was nothing to that entertained by his men. The Maoris it is true had beaten us but that was because they had been tackled wrongly.

They were soon to be undeceived.

At Puketekaure although the British had their bayonets, and were well supported by artillery they were driven from the field. What made the matter even worse was the smallness of the foe that defeated us. Not only were they few in numbers, but they were entirely destitute of artillery and had not a single bayonet.

Fancy the surprise our Tommies must have felt at being hustled off the field of battle by a foe armed only with old muskets and double-barrelled rifles, and driven off too at such a pace, that we had to leave all our dead and wounded behind.

The next day provided us with a fresh humiliation. The soldier of Britain who had come to regard the winning of battles as a sort of hereditary right had to remain in his intrenchments whilst the enemy, only a mile away, buried his dead.

Our next blunder was to allow the Maoris to build a Pah or native fort without trying to stop the work. The Maori leaders, being quite as able, if not indeed a good deal better than Sir Duncan Cameron, chose a most admirable site. They erected it in a narrow neck of land connecting the peninsula of Te Papa with the coast.

It was so clearly recognised as the key to the whole district that it was at once named the Gate Pah. Practically it was impregnable, for it could not be taken by a frontal attack, and from being surrounded by swamps could not be turned.

So soon as it was completed Sir Duncan Cameron gave orders for an instant assault, our force consisting of over 2,000 men, including a naval brigade of 200 seamen and a couple of gunboats. The force seemed ample especially as six mortars, eleven Armstrong guns, and two howitzers came up before the fight began.

The attack was made on the morning of April 27th, 1863. Success seemed certain, for during the night the 68th regiment and thirty seamen contrived to cross one of the swamps and take up a position in the rear of the Pah to cut off, although they were not hopeful, the Maoris' retreat.

The battle opened with a cannonade. Shot and shell

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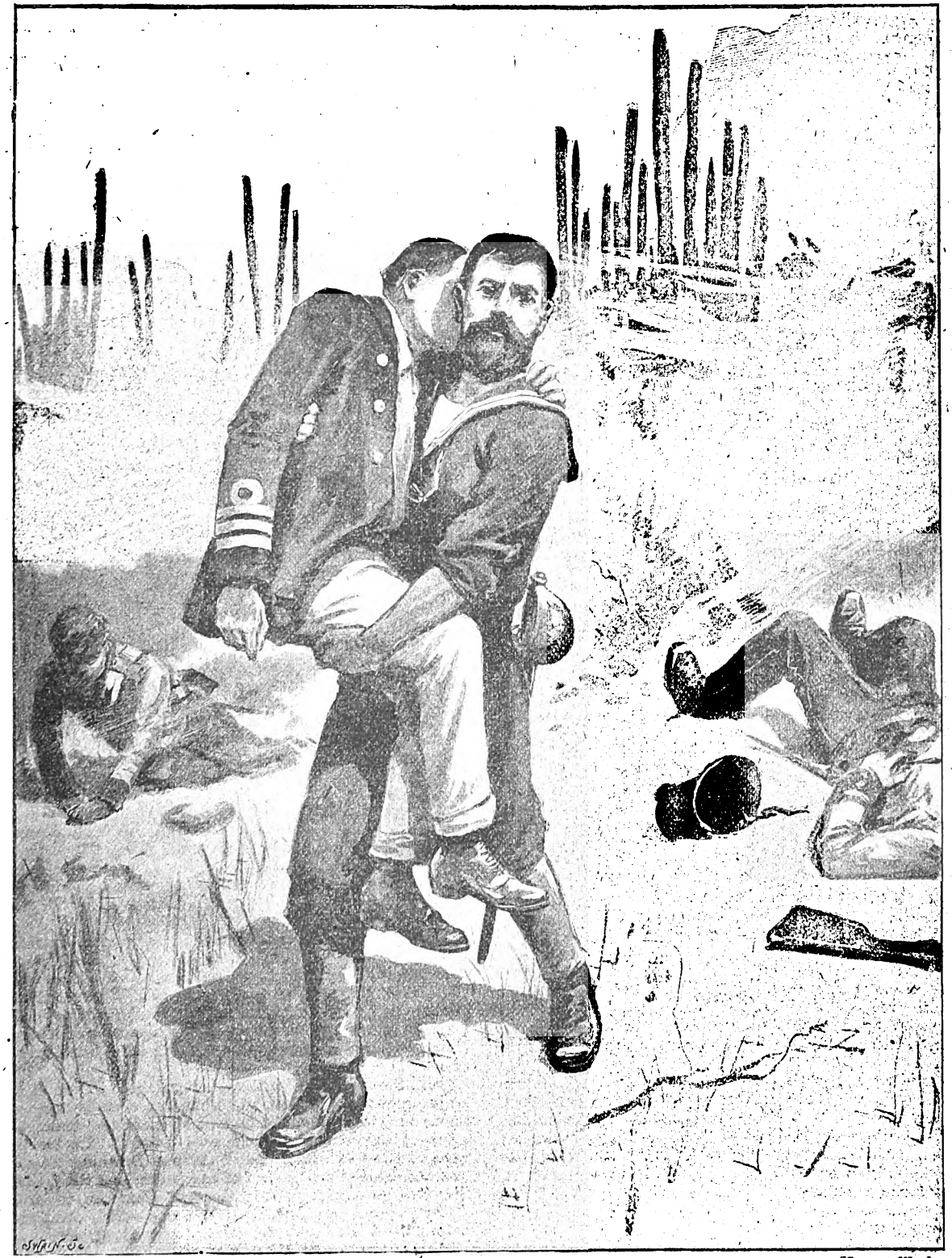

[Drawn by]

Commander Hay was carried out by Samuel Mitchell, amid a storm of bullets.

[Lawson Wood.

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were poured in with vigour for nine hours, and as everything remained quiet within the Pah, when it ceased Sir Duncan concluded that all the Maoris had been killed.

Still to make sure a storming party was formed which, after firing a number of volleys into the silent fort, gave three ringing cheers and rushed towards one of the breaches which our guns had made.

Across the ditch, up the embankment, sweeping into the Pah, like a great wave. All were rejoicing thinking the battle won, when suddenly volley after volley was poured into their midst. Thrown into instant confusion the soldiers rushed panic-stricken from the trap, to the dismay of their general who instantly ordered up the reserves.

To stem the retreat Captain Hamilton, R. N., placed himself at the head of the supports, a brave action which might have turned the fortunes of the day, but, unfortunately, he had not gone a dozen yards when a bullet crashed through his brain.

Bereft of their leader, the supports, the moment they mingled with the attacking force, became infected with panic too and despite the remonstrances of their officers fled down the narrow path with their comrades. The Maoris seeing this followed up the fugitives, pouring into the disordered ranks such a succession of deadly volleys that at last our troops, incredible as it sounds, fairly ran, never stopping till they reached their camp.

General Cameron was so upset at this untoward incident that he retired to his tent and was not seen for the next two days.

The great mystery as to where the Maoris hid themselves was made clear later when it was found, that to escape the artillery fire, they had provided themselves with underground chambers, the entrances to which were hidden behind branches so skilfully arranged that the Maoris were able to creep from their hiding-places before we were aware of their presence.

For the second time in this remarkable war the killed and wounded were left in the enemies' hands all save one, Commander Hay, who was carried out of the Pah by Samuel Mitchell amidst a storm of bullets. For this brave action Mitchell received the Victoria Cross.

Although greatly humiliated, the defeated soldiers and sailors were Britons, and when they grew tired of blaming each other, a feeling of exasperation set in.

Some of the "Fighting Forty-third" cried like children when they thought of what their forefathers had done in the Peninsular, and all the troops vowed as one man to teach the Maoris a lesson the next day.

The natives must somehow have got an inkling of our intention, for they stole away during the night.

Next day when our soldiers had recovered their lost courage, they charged Pah making straight for the hiding-place, the whereabouts of which had been discovered by our wounded, who had escaped during the night and crawled back to camp, but they found the birds flown.

It is a pleasure to turn from episodes like these to others, in which our soldiers appear at their best.

General Pratt although possessing few of the qualities of a great leader, was not without military knowledge. He had built a chain of redoubts to protect New Plymouth and garrisoned them with detachments of the regiments stationed in the country. Fort No. 7 was approached by a narrow defile bordered by dense bushes and gigantic ferns.

Captain Richards and a scouting party of the 40th, who held this fort, were returning home when they were received on entering the defile with a heavy fire from an unseen foe.

Although the order was given to extend in skirmishing order the firing was so deadly that in a few minutes only three wounded men and four muskets were left.

The three poor fellows scorning to sue for quarter managed to reach a large tree with the intention of holding out till assistance arrived from the fort.

Although the Maoris were only thirty feet away Sergeant Lucas, one of the survivors and a most expert shot, kept up such an incessant fire that the Maoris fearing that their prey would escape, left their hiding-place and charged the tree.

After Lucas had killed eight the Maoris retreated. A few minutes later another rush was made and again the assailants were driven back. At last the garrison appeared. Taking the natives in their rear they cut them to pieces. For his bravery Lucas was presented with the Victoria Cross.

This encounter led to a series of savage reprisals. In May 1863, two officers and eight men were fired on from the bush and killed. This was followed by a battle which was fought at the junction of the Manga-pike river with the Waipa. Here a detachment of infantry under Sir Henry Havelock were quartered close by the river where they frequently went to bathe, notwithstanding the presence of Maoris on the opposite banks whom they jocularly threatened by shaking their towels at them.

One afternoon these bathers whilst enjoying a swim were greeted with a volley from the enemy. Tommy did not remain long in the water after this. Rushing to the camp they quickly dressed and fired at their assailants who were largely reinforced. Our troops were also strengthened by arrivals from the station close at hand. The soldiers crossed the river on an improvised plank bridge.

Then the fight began. For over two hours the Maoris who thickly lined the precipitous banks, kept our men in the river bed, but the summit was reached at last. The combat which then ensued was remarkable from the fact that no directions were given. It was not so much a battle as a series of hand-to-hand encounters, the men and officers fighting like tigers.

The opportunity our men had been longing for had come. They wiped off old scores that day. They killed hundreds and drove the rest from the field. During the fight the Maoris endeavoured to lure us into an ambush but without success. It is said that over 300 Maoris were bayoneted in this fight.

During 1863 reinforcements had so poured in, that General Cameron found himself able to dispose of 25,000 men. The Maoris now fell back on a place with the curious name of Mere Mire, near the Waikoto river. Although greatly outnumbered they showed no fear. Their only artillery was two old ship guns and these, being without common shot, they loaded with large nails.

Still, they were not without advantages. They held an impregnable position, and what was even better for them, our Government at home had taken the management of the war into their own hands. The troops were burning to attack the Pah, but Downing Street had not decided on its plan of campaign, and till it did, Sir George Grey forbade General Cameron to stir. Delays in war are expensive. The one which occurred before Mere Mire cost the country over £1,000,000.

Permission to attack was given at last. The new comer had been regaled with wonderful stories of the

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Maori valour which, of course, coming of a phlegmatic unemotional race, he paid no attention to. He charged the Pah at Mere Mire at the point of the bayonet, and, to his intense disgust, found it empty. The Maoris had fallen back on another Pah at Rangiriri. We drove the natives from the earthworks of this fortress, but when the men reached the inner palisade charge after charge was repulsed. Then the engineers undermined the Pah, but the fuse was damp and the attempt failed. Then the troops tried again. A body of seamen nearly effected an entrance, but the fire was so hot that they too had to retreat. Under a capable general, the Pah would no doubt have soon fallen. Whether General Cameron ever would have succeeded is doubtful.

Fortunately, the Maoris helped him out of the difficulty by next morning hoisting the white flag. Great was our chagrin when we got inside to find that the prime instigator of the rebellion, a chief known as William Thompson, and the bulk of his followers had escaped.

Peace being impossible till we captured this warrior, our troops then marched to Piko Piko, a strong Pah on the summit of a mountain overlooking the Waipa.

After studying this Pah, for we were beginning to regard all New Zealand fortresses as death traps. General Cameron did what any tyro in tactics could have told him was the proper thing to do. He sent a strong detachment to the rear, burnt a couple of Maori villages, and cut the Maoris' communications.

He might have caught them too had he been a little smarter. As it was, the Maoris crept out one night and retreated further into the interior.

Still, blunder as we did, Mr. Atkins never missed a chance of displaying his qualities.

They came on an enormously strong Pah at Ohapau. It would have been better for the Maoris if we had come a week later for it was not quite finished. A dash at a weak spot, a sharp fight inside, and then straight for the underground chambers. The fight which ensued in one of these lasted four hours. When we left in the evening the whole of the gunners were dead.

An even more desperate fight was waged at Orakau Pah. In this encounter we expected an easy victory, as the force under Brigadier-General Carey was five times more numerous than the Maoris.

But their Pah was strong and the defenders the very pick of the Maori warriors.

A gap was made, guns were put in position, in fact, the most skilful appliances of military engineering were used against the place.

For a whole day 1,500 troops blazed away with shot, shell, grape, canister, and hand grenades. Over 50,000 rounds of Enfield cartridges were expended during the first day and yet the Maoris would not surrender. Throughout the day they returned our fire with great vigour.

Next day, General Cameron, who had arrived, was so filled with admiration of their valour that he held a parley.

For a few minutes the firing was suspended whilst the natives decided on their reply. Then a chief proudly strode into our camp.

"E woa ma te kuput ennui a te Maori ka whawhei tonu ake ake ake," signifying, "Friends, this is the word of the Maori, they will fight on for ever, for ever, for ever."

The fight was then resumed. The Maoris repulsed attack after attack. They fought as long as their ammunition lasted. When this was gone they bolted with the troops in full pursuit. The chief, Rewi, escaped, but the rest were overtaken, those who escaped the bayonet were driven into a swamp.

Although this defeat virtually broke the back of the rebellion peace was not restored till seven years later. The cost of the war has never transpired. Five millions are admitted to have been spent up to the end of 1863. The probability is that the total cost was double that sum.

(*Next week*: **The War in Abyssinia.**)

LOOK OUT

for our new serial story,

'The Fate of Michael Standridge,'

IT BEGINS THE WEEK AFTER NEXT.

HEADON HILL *IS THE AUTHOR.*

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SHORT STORIES THAT MAKE YOU LAUGH.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "Guilty Gold," by Headon Hill, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Edi or, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, April 1st. Post-cards only, please. The prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. Robert Allan, of 14 Marylands Road, Maida Vale, W. The winning contribution is marked with a star thus *.

DOCTOR (to new Irish man-servant): "I see you have a glass eye, Pat."

Pat: "Yes, sorr, but it's a rale swindle; the divil a bit can I see wid it at all, at all!"

"ALL you need, professor," said the doctor, cheerfully, "is a tonic in the shape of fresh air."

"What is the shape of fresh air?" asked the doctor's patient.

"YOU should never take anything that doesn't agree with you," the physician told him.

"If I'd always followed that rule, Maria," he remarked to his wife, "where would you be?"

SHE: "Don't you feel a draught over there by that window?"

He (timidly): "Yes, I b-believe I do. Shall I p-pull down the b-blind, or c-come over and sit by you?"

She: "Well, I would advise you to pull down the blind first."

"MISTER," said the small boy to the chemist, "give me a bottle o' them pills you sold father the day before yesterday."

"Are they doing him good?"

"I dunno whether they're doin' father any good or not, but they're doing me good. They jest fit my new air gun!"

"I THINK there should be a law against publishing lies," said the innocent faced man as he laid down his paper and heaved a sigh.

"Have you discovered a lie?" was asked by a fellow passenger.

"I'm sure of it. A man who was on a steamer when she was wrecked claims to have swum a distance of forty miles to land. We know that is a physical impossibility. I myself was once on a steamer lost off the coast, and at that time I was called a champion swimmer. I swam and swam and swam, but I didn't swim no forty miles. I could not have done it."

"How far did you swim?"

"Thirty-nine miles to a foot, sir, and any man in this world who says he has swum forty speaks falsely, sir, and the truth isn't in him, sir!"

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* ON the Cunard wharf at Liverpool an Irishman with curiosity in his eye, was noticed looking long and wonderingly at a monster anchor that was lying on the landing. He was simply on a tour of observation, but his movements were considered very suspicious by the man in charge, who approached the idler, and asked him why he was loafing about there so long.

Said the Irishman, as he pointed to the huge mass of iron:

"Sor, it isn't loafing I am, but if I stay here a week, I'll get a look at the feller that's able to handle that pick."

"THIS seems a very healthy spot, my man," said the tourist to Giles, "I suppose people don't die here very often?"

"No, sir. They only die once!"

CHOLLY: "This is my grandmother's portrait, and I am thought to have some of her features."

His Adored: "Yes, I see a strong resemblance between her eyebrows and your moustache."

MRS. A: "So your daughter is studying for the stage?"

Mrs. B: "Yes, and she is progressing very rapidly."

Mrs. A: "How far has she got?"

Mrs. B: "She has already had her photograph taken as Lady Macbeth."

LADY: "Well, what do you want?"

Tramp: "Last time I was round here you gave me pie what yer said yer cooked yerself, lady."

"Well?"

"Well, I merely called here to know who's goin' to compensate me for the time I wasted in hospital."

AN officer of a Lancashire yeomanry regiment, in an address to his troops, made a stirring allusion to the medals worn by some army veterans in the ranks. One of the volunteers afterwards went home in a very thoughtful frame of mind, and the next morning he came on parade with several medals on his breast. Said the officer:

"I didn't know you had been in the regulars."

"No, I ain't," said the man.

"Well, how about the medals, my good fellow? They can't be yours."

"Can't they?" the man promptly replied; "aye, but they be. My old coo won 'em all at Bootle cattle show."

IF there is one luxury the Yorkshire collier hates to pay extra for, it is his theatre ticket. He will sit through any performance you like to inflict upon him, from a sanguinary war-drama to a neurotic German play, but you touch him on the raw when you charge him more than the usual price for his seat in the gallery.

The cost of a famous tragedian's visit to a West Riding theatre was so great that the prices were raised all round. Unaware of this change, several *habitués* of the gallery tendered the usual sixpence, and were informed by the ticket-seller that the price of admission had been doubled.

"Doubled!" echoed the indignant colliers. "We'll see you swingin' afore we'll pay it. What's the play?"

"*Hamlet*," snapped the ticket-seller. "Stand back and let somebody else come if you don't want to."

The colliers fell back and conferred with one another. Finally, one of them elbowed his way to the box.

"We ain't smitten wi' *Hamlet*, guv'nor, but we don't want to turn back now we've got so far," he awkwardly explained; "make it *The Grip of Iron* or *Drink*, an' we'll dub up the extra tanner!"

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Ethel: "What foolish things a young man will do when he is in love!"

Edith (breathlessly): "Oh, Ethel! Has he proposed?"

"I don't understand you. A few minutes ago you said Medlesome was a great business man, and now you say he doesn't know his own business."

"Exactly; other people's business is his speciality."

Tramp: "Haven't you got something for me to do?"

Farmer: "No, I'm afraid not. There is not much work just now."

Tramp: "I don't want much. You would be surprised to see with how little work I could get along."

"I've got a tongue-tied child, doctor. Can anything be done for it?"

"Boy or girl?"

"Girl."

"Humph! I think you'd better not interfere with the workings of Providence, ma'am."

On one occasion Lord Wolseley's zeal for the welfare of his men got the better of his discretion.

Dinner was being served to the soldiers, and orderlies hurried backward and forward with steaming pails of soup.

Lord Wolseley stopped one of them.

The man was at attention in a moment.

"Remove the lid."

No sooner said than done.

"Let me taste it."

"But, plaze yer——"

"Let me taste it, I say."

And taste it he did.

"Disgraceful! Tastes like nothing in the world but dish water."

"Plaze yer honour," gasped the man, "and so it is."

Proved it to Him.—"Whew!" exclaimed the ordinary man in the tram, turning to his neighbour, "is this hot enough for you?"

The one addressed carefully laid down his paper, removed his glasses, and faced his questioner.

"My friend," he commenced, "in order for us to discuss this subject with any degree of intelligence, we must first understand each other. By 'this,' I suppose you refer to the weather. Yes, sir, this is hot enough for me, and I will prove, my dear sir, why such a thing is possible. The thermometer—at least the one I noticed—registered 115 deg. in the shade. That is something like blood heat, I believe, and, according to physicians, is dangerous. Five or six persons have suffered sunstrokes, I understand, and without the slightest doubt it was hot enough for them. Another thing, I saw you were wiping your brow. That alone would prove that your brow was heated, or else, as is possible, understand, you may be suffering from a cold sweat. However, I believe the perspiration on your brow is caused by heat. Therefore, with five or six sunstrokes within the last hour, the sweat running from your brow, and the thermometer registering 115 degrees in the shade, we have three distinct arguments to prove that it is hot enough for both of us. Have you any arguments to advance to the contrary, sir?"

But the ordinary man had turned his back, not even responding when his friend reached over and pulled him violently by the shoulders.

A scientist says that every healthy boy should be able to drop off to sleep in ten minutes. This does not mean office boys, who are expected to do the same thing in one and three-quarter minutes.

A man was recently charged in court with assault and robbery on the King's highway. Prisoner's counsel, addressing the Bench, said he would produce witnesses to prove that at the time stated in the indictment, the prisoner was in his home nursing his child and soothing it to sleep.

Prisoner: "Yes, my lord, we will prove a lullaby."

"Our cook was going to leave yesterday, but my wife's diplomacy saved the day."

"Is that so?"

"Yes; when the cook gave her notice, my wife, with great presence of mind, said: 'That's too bad, Bridget, but I'm not surprised. Several of the neighbours' girls predicted you wouldn't have any chance with the handsome new policeman who is assigned to this beat.'"

In a provincial court recently Farmer A sought to recover from his neighbour, Farmer B, the value of certain sheep alleged to have been worried by B's dog. For the defence it was contended that the dog which worried the sheep belonged not to B, but to A, and the following dialogue took place:

Counsel for the defendant: "You admit that the defendant's dog and yours were alike?"

Plaintiff: "Yes, they wor as much alike as two peas."

Counsel: "When you saw the dog worrying your sheep, where were you?"

Plaintiff: "About a hundred yards away."

Counsel: "One hundred yards! And you mean to say that at that distance you were near enough to swear the dog was defendant's and not your own?"

Plaintiff: "Yes!"

Counsel: "Wonderful! Now do you mind telling the court what made you so sure on the point?"

Plaintiff: "Not a bit! Ye see, ma dog had been dead two days!"

Verdict for the plaintiff.

Making Her Choice.—"Choose between us!"

Winkleton folded up his evening newspaper and savagely threw it on the floor.

"Yes, madam," he continued, "I tell you once for all that you can't have both of us. The last time that dressmaker was in the house for a week I vowed that I never would stand it again, and I won't. As for being under the same roof with two half-crazy and absorbed women, and requiring a rake every morning to get the odd pieces of cloth out of my clothes; to hear the rattle and whirr of that confounded sewing machine, and to sit at my meals and listen to a lot of cut bias and gros grain, ruffled and flounced, and pleated talk—I've had all I'm ever going to have. If I'm to be turned out of my own house, all right; but you can't have both of us. I leave the day she comes. You'll have to make your decision quick. Come, madam, which shall it be, the dressmaker or me?"

Mrs. Winkleton looked at her husband with a hopeless, half-despairing look, in which were discernible some traces of indignation and a sense of injustice.

"If you must go, dear," she said softly, "why, I have nothing more to say!"

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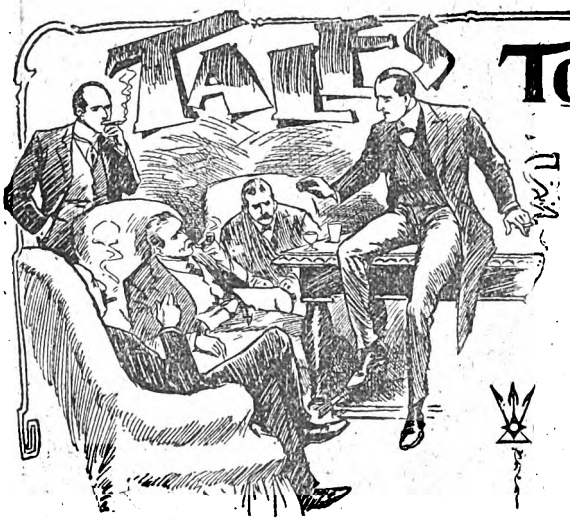

Told "off Duty."

[You probably don't know the "Stand-Easy" Club. It isn't in the directory, and you might live next door to the place for years without knowing of its existence by that name. It isn't a conventional club; there is no subscription, and there is no register of members. It is merely a room in a quiet, orderly, and select hostelry in Westminster, where, by common consent, a number of officials of all kinds meet when "off duty." There you may find detectives from Scotland Yard, near by; firemen, commissionaires, a soldier or two, and maybe a doctor from St. Thomas' Hospital or elsewhere. A motley crowd they would be if they wore their uniforms, but at the "Stand-Easy" uniforms are a rarity, "mufti" being the unwritten rule. The result is a gathering of quiet, well-behaved, and well-dressed men. Saturday night is the time when one sees the biggest muster, for then it is the custom for one member to regale the company with a story, the story being, as a rule, an account of some incident in the teller's own career.]

The Diver's Story.

A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY.

"Well," said Martin Cuffe, "I wasn't, as you may say, under orders to anybody, seeing as I had, for the most part at any rate, a private diving business of my own; but for all that, duty's duty all the world over, for it's just doing the right thing in the right way.

"I'm 'off duty' now, thank goodness! for I've had enough of under-water work to last me a lifetime, and though I was—and am, for the matter of that—fond of it—in a way, still, the wear and tear of it 'buckles' a man like, and makes him to be right down glad of the last lazy spell.

"Most of my jobs I did myself, but I had one or two decent fellows as I employed, off and on, to do the easy bits; things, I mean, as didn't want more than the ordinary amount of 'savee' and common-sense.

"They were good enough chaps in their way, but they'd 'a' lost their heads, I'm thinking, in any specially tight fit.

"There's one job in particular I had as just comes to my mind, as I'll never forget—no, not if I lives to be a hundred! Well, fact is, it were my last, for what I got out of it (between ourselves) made it possible for me to put off the 'helmet' for ever.

"It's a story worth hearing—at least, I think so; and if you're the men I take you to be, you'll be of my opinion when I've unreeled it.

"I was sitting by the fire in my little office in the Minories on a cold afternoon in November, '95.

"I'd got a fit of the 'blues.' Not long returned from a rather nasty job near Filey, off the Yorkshire coast, I fancy I'd caught a bit of a chill. Anyway, I felt moody-minded and out of sorts.

"'Gentleman to see you, Mr. Cuffe,' said the old woman (she went by the name of 'the office girl'), who served all the floors in the house.

"'Eh,' said I, rousing myself. 'Gentleman; show him up.'

"Martha, the 'office girl,' returned almost directly, and ushered in a tall, well-dressed, middle-aged man.

"'Mr. Cuffe—Mr. Martin Cuffe?' said he, with a smile that showed a good set of teeth, and peering curiously from under his nearly white pent-house eyebrows.

"'The same, sir,' I replied, rising. 'Will you take a chair,' indicating the only other one in the room.

"'No; I would rather stand.'

"I never allow other people's eccentricities to interfere with my own comforts, so I just sat down again and waited developements.

"'Have you anything special on now, Mr. Cuffe? in a professional sense I mean.'

"'No!' said I, 'nothing, that is of any account. I've a couple of hands at work in the Mersey, but they can get along very well without me.'

"'Ah! then you would be open to undertake a commission?'

"'Depends on what the commission is,' said I.

"I didn't quite like my visitor's looks, and decided in my own mind to be cautious and not too hasty in coming to a conclusion either way with him.

"'It is a deep-sea business,' said the other, with one hand resting on the table.

"'Whereabouts?'

"'A mile or so off the Start.'

"'Anything to come up?'

"'Well!—'m—yes—; there is—something to come up?'

"'And what, if I may ask, may the something be?'

"'A box—just a—a box of papers—only papers!'

"'Just so; only papers. Nothing else?'

"'No, I think not. Much good coin went down, I believe, with the ship; but I am concerned only with the box—a charge of my own—a—er——'

"'Oh! I see!—you, Mr. Aloysius Ponsonby,' said I, reading from the card that he had handed me at the outset. 'You were a passenger on board then?'

"'Yes, I sailed from Table Bay in the *Caradoc* on——'

"'The *Caradoc*!—why, that's the mail steamer that foundered off the Start a month since!'

"'Yes, that is the vessel'

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"'There were but two saved; one passenger, and a seaman.'

"'That is so. I was that passenger.'

"'Dear me! this is very interesting, Mr. Ponsonby,' said I, 'but surely, I cannot act in any way, without the authority of the Mail Company.'

"'Which,' said Mr. Ponsonby, hastily. 'I have here!' with the words producing an imposing-looking document from the breast pocket of his coat.

"'Yes, it is quite regular and satisfactory,' said I, after a glance at the paper, that purported to be the official authorisation of the Mail Co., countersigned by the hand of the Salvage Department of the Board of Trade.

"'Now,' said the other, 'the idea is simply this—that you, with whatever assistance you may require (all of you being sworn to secrecy), shall, from a suitable vessel to be furnished by me and at my expense, descend to the wreck of the *Caradoc*, and search for and bring up to the surface a certain sheet-iron box, eighteen inches square, and upon which is painted in plain white letters —*Croxford Estate. A.P.* For this service you, Martin Cuffe, are to receive the sum of £2,000 sterling.'

"'And supposing,' said I, looking him squarely in the face; 'supposing I fail either to find the box or to bring it to the surface—how then?'

"'In either eventuality you will be paid the sum of £200.'

"It was, in one way, a speculation; and yet, if the box were really there, and get-at-able, it would go hard with me if I could not succeed in both finding and raising it.

"'Look here, sir,' I said at last, when I had for a minute or two mentally studied the pros. and cons., 'look here. guarantee me a minimum bonus of £300 in the event, through no fault of my own, of failure, and I'm your man!'

"The readiness with which he agreed to my terms, ought to have convinced me that matters were not shipshape and quite as they should be; but the temptation of the possible £2,000 was too great and alluring, and so, recklessly throwing my ballast overboard, I resolved to risk it.

"Before leaving my office that afternoon, Ponsonby arranged to visit me the next day, when he was to hand me a banker's draft for £2,000, post-dated a fortnight; I, on my part, undertaking, over my signature, to return same in exchange for current-dated cheque, value £200, upon failure to bring up from the wreck of the *Caradoc* the box in question.

* * * * *

"In the early morning of November 28th, '95, a small, smart screw yacht, with steam up, might have been seen lying off the little coast town of Kingston, in Bigbury Bay, some fifteen miles to the westward of the Start.

"At this hour there was no one on board the *Mermaid*, except myself, my chief assistant, George Pfeil, and the master and crew.

"At 9 a.m. we were to up-anchor and head for the Start. I had full written instructions from Ponsonby, together with a chart showing the exact position, so far as it could be known, of the *Caradoc*. With the help of these I calculated to be able to bring things to a successful issue, though, having regard to some of the former, I quite made up my mind to follow my own instincts and to do the thing, if it were to be done at all in my own way.

"I could not help, somehow, fancying that Ponsonby, in spite of the apparent straightforwardness of that gentleman, was playing a game of some sort; not, perhaps, a fraudulent one (although even that, maybe, was among the possibles), but a game, having for its object prospective advantage to him.

"I could, however, prove nothing; and in the face of official permission to carry out diving operations in connection with the *Caradoc*, I could only continue to *fancy*, and let things pan out as best they would.

"The anchor, at nine o'clock sharp, was hove 'short,' and we were actually under weigh, when one of the hands reported a steam launch as putting out from Kingston Quay, and making for us at top speed.

"There was nothing for it but to heave to, and await events.

I didn't quite like my visitor's looks.

"Cleaving the water in racing fashion, the little boat snorted and panted up to us in a cloud of steam.

"Looking over the side, I saw Ponsonby making his way up the Jacob's ladder hand over fist.

"'Full speed ahead!' he yelled out, the moment his foot touched the deck.

"Truth to say, I thought the man was mad; but as I turned my head to watch the launch depart for the shore, I saw something that let daylight into the puzzle.

"This was nothing less than another boat (a larger one than the first) coming fast in our direction.

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"I could distinctly make out a figure standing in the bows of the on-coming craft, and waving his hand, in evident stimulation of the engineer.

"As they passed the returning launch the man hailed her, though, of course, I could not hear what was said.

"All this while Ponsonby, in excited tones, was frantically urging the master of the *Mermaid* to fresh exertions. The result was that we soon distanced the boat, and in less than a quarter of an hour completely lost sight of her.

"'Now, Cuffe,' said Ponsonby to me, 'in about an hour and a half we shall be on the ground. Are you ready?'

"'Yes,' said I, 'I'm ready; but there was no necessity for you to come with us.'

"'I am the best judge of that!' retorted the other, none too pleasantly. 'This is a very important matter for me, and I wish to be on the spot when the box comes to hand.'

"There was nothing for me to say, whatever my thoughts might be, so I kept my own counsel as a discretionary measure.

"I could not but notice Ponsonby's evident relief as we steamed out of sight of the second boat.

"The process of putting two and two together was becoming with me more and more definite and productive.

"The very uneasiness of the man was suspicious; so much so that I began to think that I was in for a strange bit of business.

"About half-past eleven (in sailor language 'seven bells') the engines, by Ponsonby's order, were stopped, and preparations made, by means of head sails and spanker, to bring the vessel to and keep her so.

"Rapidly I got out all my tackle, fixed it, and was soon in readiness to go over the side.

"The estimated depth of water in which the *Caradoc* lay, was, as near as possible, eleven fathoms; a tidy dive with the 'dress.'

"The very last thing I saw as I looked up through the 'goggles,' before sinking, was Ponsonby, glaring down with an expression, such as I have never seen on any man's face before or since.

"Greed — fierce, wolfish anticipation — literally glowered in his eyes; till I was glad to get beneath the water, out of their baleful influence.

"Upon reaching the bottom I could not at first see anything distinctly; a recent slight squall having disturbed the water and rendered it somewhat muddy. It was settling fast, however, and as it gradually cleared, I could make out that I was standing midway between two vessels, one of far greater bulk than the other.

"It did not take me long to identify the *Caradoc*, although the silting-up of sand and slush and the ships' consequent settlement in the 'bottom' would have made it difficult for a novice.

"I tested the tubes and cords to make sure of their being clear and workable, and then proceeded to board the wreck through a large gap in the port bulwarks; the ship lying absolutely on her port beam ends.

"According to my instructions I should find the box in the third mid-ship cabin on the starboard side.

"The chief thing to guard against was the fouling of the air-tubes and life-lines in the descent of the main stairway leading to the first-class berths.

"I safely accomplished it, however, and groped my way to the third starboard cabin. The door was, of course, torn off; and it might be, I thought, that the box had been washed out into some hole and corner of the cabin corridor.

"It was while I was deliberating as to whether I should confine my search to the cabin itself, or whether I should make a general examination of its immediate neighbourhood, that I felt—as I am a living man!—the apparently caressing touch of human fingers on the back of my own left hand!

"I could see nothing;—I could only feel that something was uncannily near to me.

"Summoning up all my courage (I am not by nature a coward), I reached out, and touched, what I knew from experience to be the dead body of a human being. So far as I could make out, it was jammed in a sitting posture (between a bulkhead and the framework of the corridor), on some slight elevation.

"Slowly lowering my hand, it came in contact with a square object, which it at once flashed upon me, must be—the box.

"To make sure, I uncovered, and directed upon it, the little submarine lamp I carried; and there, gleaming ghostly white, beneath the depressed index finger of the dead man's hand was the inscription:

"'*Croxford Estate. A. P.*'

"By some misadventure my lamp went suddenly out, at once after I had read the legend on the box. I had, therefore, no time in which to examine the body sitting upon it.

"To raise it, I must displace its ghastly custodian. Before doing this I decided to go to the surface and report my partial success; and obtain a couple of small steel hand-bars, necessary to remove the box out of the wreck.

"Jerking the signal cord, I was soon mounting the side of the *Mermaid*.

"'Where is it? Where is it?' cried Ponsonby excitedly.

"Then I told him.

"Sakes! how that man did swear! and all because I had not at once sent up the box.

"'Quick! Quick! get you down!' he shouted.

"'There's no such hurry,' I said, quietly.

"'No hurry! There is! get you down, I say!'

"The master, who was helping me to tighten my straps, here nudged me, and pointed to the eastward. My helmet being off, I could see distinctly the smoke of a small steam-vessel approaching from that direction.

"Ponsonby saw that I had noticed it, and seemed almost beside himself with ungovernable rage.

"'If you don't get down within two minutes,' he screamed, 'I'll throw you over the side!'

"'Steady! steady!' I said. 'Two can play at that game. What yours may be I can't exactly say, but I'm prepared to make a good guess.

"'Oh, I'm going down—now' (as he made a rush at me, Smithson, the master, interposing to prevent mischief), 'but I won't guarantee that the box comes up before the arrival of that boat,' and I pointed meaningly to the little speck int he far distance.

"He was furious and purple with passion, but with one glance at him through my 'windows,' I sank out of sight.

"Now comes the most remarkable part of my story, so far, at least, as it personally concerns me.

"I descended to about the same spot, making allowance for the slight drifting of the *Mermaid*; but curiously, as I now think, my attention was irresistibly

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attracted, not by the hull of the *Caradoc*, but by the strangely quaint object on the other side of me.

"Its form (as much of it, anyway, as I could well see, for it was nearly embedded in sand, and covered with weed, and the lower marine crustacea), was certainly that of one of the craft of the Carolian period. The high, built up, carved stern, was really all that was visible, the name, as I flashed my lamp upon it, standing plainly out in raised, faded gold letters, *The Royal Cenotheri*.

"Immediately under the port quarter, just over where the rudder-post was broken short off, was a large, jagged hole (made, probably, by encounter with a rock), on the sand below it, being a number of rude, rusty-looking, barrel-shaped objects.

It was jammed in a sitting posture.

"I touched one of these rather smartly with a steel bar. It fell to pieces on the instant at my feet, scattering into a thousand small fragments.

"I stooped and picked up one of them.

"It was nearly circular, and of a peculiar colour and size.

"Scraping it carefully to remove the dirt and incrustation that obliterated it, presently the head of a man appeared on the one side of it.

"*Then I knew!*

"I had accidentally happened upon one of old Phipp's failures!

"Phipps was an enterprising inventor and what not in King Charles II.'s time. He made several periodical efforts to raise the money lost by the foundering of two or three treasure ships, but always without success.

"It had been reserved for me to make the discovery, and, all being well, to reap the harvest.

"The water, even at the bottom, was now so calm and clear that I had no difficulty, with the aid of my lamp, in gauging the extent of my find.

"Ponsonby and his box were now a secondary consideration with me.

"Still, as that worthy might, if I delayed too long, be nasty, and work me an injury from above, I had to devise a course of action which should at once blind him and secure to myself my new-found wealth.

"Signalling again, I rose to the surface, expecting, of course, a torrent of ugly words and menaces.

"Guess my astonishment, then, when I saw, as I topped the Jacob's ladder, Ponsonby in the act of disappearing in a flying leap over the opposite side of the *Mermaid* to that where I stood.

"The reason was speedily patent.

"The little steam craft was made fast alongside, while on our deck were standing two gentlemen in earnest conversation with Captain Smithson.

"Briefly, the situation was this.

"Ponsonby, or rather Edward Dighton, a cousin of the actual owner of the box, had fraudulently attempted to obtain possession of it. He had never been a passenger by the *Caradoc*; the real Aloysius Ponsonby, eldest son of the late Sir Charles Ponsonby, Bart. of Croxford Court, Derbyshire, having been on his way home to England (the precious box in his custody) in the ill-fated vessel.

"How the swindling rascal hoped to benefit by the papers in young Ponsonby's possession, it's impossible to say, there being two other sons of the old baronet living.

"Undoubtedly the body I had seen in the *Caradoc's* cabin was that of the true and lawful Aloysius Ponsonby, who, poor chap! even in death laid claim to that which was his by heritable right.

"Why the Croxford family papers should have travelled to Africa at all was a mystery, and is likely to remain one.

"Edward Dighton's body was never found. It was in a fit of desperate disappointment and mad frenzy that he had thrown his life away. He could not face the searching challenge of Mr. Carle, the Ponsonby's family solicitor, who, with the manager of the Mail Company had got on the track of his scheme, arriving just in time to frustrate it.

"The gold? Oh, yes! I got it up, but how—well, I had better not, perhaps, say.

"I don't want to provoke, even now, awkward official questions, though I quite believe that, as the discoverer of the treasure-trove, I was fairly entitled to the enjoyment of it.

"I, of course, had no objection to carry out my original contract with the pseudo Ponsonby, and to send up the box for delivery into the hands of its rightful owners.

"It will always be a puzzle to me how Dighton got the authorization of the Mail Company and the counter-signature of the Board of Trade salvage man.

"It was on a proper printed form, and though, of course, forged, got up in such style as to deceive even officialism itself."

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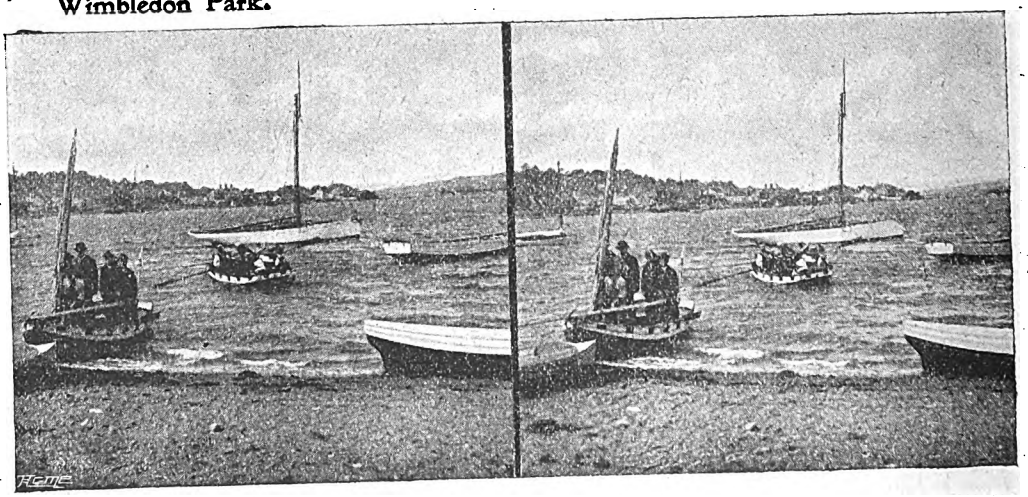
Our Stereoscopic Gallery.

Wimbledon Park.



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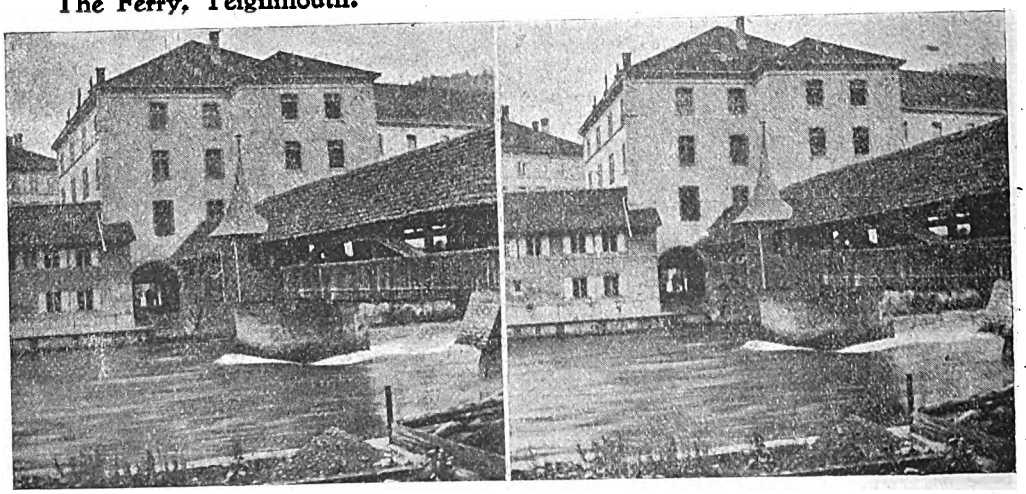

Lucerne.

To be cut out and looked at through a stereoscope, which can be supplied by *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., for 2s., post free.

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The Eaton Square Elopement.

I.

"You," said Mostyn, "are the man to do it."

"If you said that I am most emphatically the man who is not going to do it," I returned, reaching for another cigarette, "you would be nearer the mark."

"But you *must* do it," cried my friend, pushing his fingers through his yellow hair in a manner expressive of a quarrel with the world.

"But, you ass, I've never seen the girl!" I cried.

"All the better," grunted Mostyn, laconically; and I sought in the Teofanis relief from his absurdities. As I glanced round his scantily-furnished chambers, and thought of the luxurious home in Eaton Square which he proposed to rob of its dearest treasure, I laughed aloud. My friends say I have a musical laugh.

"Solomon has remarked that the laughter of some people," meditated Mostyn, "is like the crackling of thorns under a pot." Then he swallowed his whisky at a gulp and contemplated the ceiling.

"Can't you see how absurd you are?" I asked him. "Look here. You are a barrister, with not too many briefs and no capital."

"My capital," interrupted Mostyn, "is youth, energy, ambition, I may say, brains."

"What dividend does it pay?" I asked; and, dodging "Chitty on Contracts," went on with my exordium: "You want to marry Miss Cecilia Grimshaw, a very charming young lady, I've no doubt, but the sole heiress of Sir George Grimshaw, the millionaire ship-owner, and therefore no wife for a pauper like you. Am I right? Is it not absurd?"

"You're a grovelling worm," said Mostyn, "you're a soulless money-grub. Look here—I tell you it's all arranged. Cissie will be ready at nine-thirty. They dine at eight, then Lady Grimshaw, having absorbed a good deal of curaçoa, sleeps in the drawing-room, while Sir George retires to his study; and there, he, too, slumbers melodiously. Cissie's kit is all packed; she will be ready at the area-gate at nine-thirty. You meet her there, pop her into a cab, and meet me at Victoria in time for the 9.40. After which, Dover, Paris and happiness!"

"Why don't you meet her yourself?" I demanded, with some heat. "She's not my girl. I'm not going about carrying off people's girls for them!"

Mostyn banged his fist on the table, and made the glasses rock.

"Why, you blithering idiot!" he cried, "I'm as well known about the vicinity of their house as the bobby on the beat. I should be spotted in one act. All the servants are devoted to the old man, and a kitchenmaid going out to post a letter might see me loafing about, and then all would be up. No, you must go, old chap, and bring her to me. It's the only way."

I was touched, in spite of myself, by the lad's earnestness and sincerity. It was very wrong of me to aid and abet him, for I was five years his senior, and had administered to him at school that amount of mild bullying without which the British fag is not worth his salt. Yet, on the impulse of the moment, I signified my assent to the mad-headed enterprise he proposed.

"Good man!" was his only comment, as he shoved the decanter across the table to me.

There was a few moments' pause, while we both smoked meditatively, I already repenting of my rash promise. On the other hand, I argued to myself that these two foolish young people were not to be turned from the flight—the special license was ready, the fares booked. This thing had got to happen, and I might just as well be in it, and see that Freddie Mostyn got into no serious trouble, as not.

"Begad, Phil, do you realise that this is my last bachelor night on earth?" cried Mostyn, waking up suddenly. "We'll dine, my boy, and you shall wish me luck."

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A nimble hansom was soon rapidly speeding us towards Oxford Street. The bells on the harness jingled merrily as we went, and ere we had pulled up at Frascati's, Freddie had let me into a secret which removed the last of my scruples as to the elopement.

"Now, old Sobersides," cried he, merrily, as we sped along, "I'll tell you something. I'm not quite the penniless pauper you suppose. The old girl has come round, she's seen Cissie and fallen in love with her at once. I've got her blessing and some of the very best to be going on with, and she's promised to see us straight with Papa Grimshaw. What do you say to that?"

"It is an omen!" cried Freddie.

I regret to say that by the flippant title of "the old girl," Mostyn referred to the Lady Frederica Steynes, a stately dame of the old school, and his god-mother. She was a widow, and fabulously rich; Freddie had been her idol and sole heir till some youthful escapade had disgraced and disinherited him. So I was genuinely pleased at his news.

Then a thought struck me.

"But," I said, "this removes all necessity for the elopement, so far as I can see. Papa Grimshaw would give his ears for you as a son-in-law now you are back in favour with your aristocratic pals."

"You have no imagination," said Mostyn with a sad smile. "Having courted old Grimshaw's daughter as a pauper, I'll marry her as one. Even Cissie doesn't know of the good news yet. Though I don't want any test of her fidelity—dear little girl! Then, we'll go back to Papa, and make him feel bad in his inside. The dear old thing smashes things when he's put out. So far, my attentions to Cissie have cost three chairs, a Chinese god, and a lot of miscellaneous china. Oh, yes, and the case of butterflies in the library—I forgot that. When he gets Cissie's note, I tremble for the drawing-room suite."

He was in the wildest spirits, and rattled on all through dinner.

We had not long taken our seats when the band crashed out the opening chords of the Wedding March from "Lohengrin."

"It's an omen!" cried Freddie, raising his glass. "To Cissie!"

And he drank to the future Mrs. Mostyn with great enthusiasm.

II.

Feeling more like one of those felons whom my eloquence has sometimes restored to their friends and their relations than a respectable barrister with a fair practice, I at the time appointed loitered along the area railings of Sir George Grimshaw's house, on the look out for the new edition of the runaway girl. I had put on a bowler, and a dark overcoat, and the piercing cold of the night justified me in turning up my collar, so that my face was almost concealed. I do not know why I took the trouble thus to disguise myself, save that I had a vague idea that I was a character in a detective novel, and must behave accordingly.

The cold moon rode high in the heavens and every twig, almost, in the Square gardens showed up with startling distinction. No worse night for an evasion such as that contemplated by the daughter of the house of Grimshaw, could be imagined.

A glimmer of light caught my eye. The policeman was flashing his lantern on the doors as he went past. With a sudden panic at which I as I write feel a burning twinge of shame, I started to dive across the road, with the intention of shrinking into the shadow of the gardens. Then the absurdity of such a course struck me just in time, and, walking past the policeman as he tried a door with his ponderous hand, I called cheerily, "Good-night, constable."

"Good-night, sir," he answered perfunctorily; and gradually his footsteps died away.

I returned to my post.

The drawing-room windows were blazing with light; behind them, doubtless, Lady Grimshaw was slumbering peacefully. And surely—yes—a thin, cloaked figure was standing at the area-gate, peering timidly up and down the silent Square.

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I was at the girl's side in an instant.

"You have come to take me to him," she breathed, rather than said, looking into my face.

"I am from—you know who," I answered in the same mysterious whisper. I was beginning to enjoy myself hugely.

"Let us be quick," whispered the girl.

Master Jules turned and dashed for the entrance.

We walked a little way down the square, so that the household should not hear the hansom draw up at the door, and I soon put my fair charge into a swift cab. So closely was she veiled that I could not see anything of her face, but I had heard Freddie's enthusiastic description, and longed for a peep at the features of his lady-love. The neat figure in its trim, tailor-made gown, and the smallness and whiteness of the ungloved hand which had rested for a moment on my arm stimulated my curiosity still more.

Only one sentence did the girl speak, during the short drive from the Square to Victoria.

"I have got—it—safe," she murmured.

I now knew what Freddie meant when he said that the special license was "in good hands," though I rather wondered at his giving it to his bride for safety.

So eager was the girl that she sprang from the cab almost before it had stopped. I hastened after her as soon as I had discharged a certain necessary formality with the cabby, and stood petrified with astonishment at the sight which met my gaze.

The girl was talking earnestly to a big, burly, swarthy foreigner—a Belgian by his appearance and accent—while afar off, Freddie surveyed the scene with a languid indifference. I advanced towards the girl. Her foreign companion looked up and saw me. He went livid, and turned on the girl with the snarl of a trapped wolf.

"She-devil!" he hissed, with a round Flemish oath or two. "You have betrayed me! It is the police!"

"Jules!" cried the girl, clinging to him.

Then the brute raised his brawny fist, and struck her full between her eyes.

She dropped like a stone, while Master Jules turned and dashed for the entrance, with a score of angry people in pursuit. An active station-detective dexterously tripped him, and he was promptly secured.

I turned to the girl. She was in good hands, and restoratives were being administered. But a strange thing had happened. As she fell, a box carried beneath her cloak had burst open, and a stream of glittering baubles—rings, brooches, and what not—rolled on to the dusty planks of the platform.

A hand shook me roughly by the shoulder. It belonged to Freddie Mostyn.

"Where's Cissie?" demanded that excited young man.

Too astonished to speak, I mutely pointed to the still insensible victim of the Belgian's violence.

"That isn't Cissie, you thundering idiot?" roared Freddie, scarlet with rage, "that's Ada, her maid, right enough, but where's she? Why—you—you—I don't know what to call you—you've run away with the wrong girl!"

* * * * *

Poor Ada! She was more sinned against than sinning; and at the subsequent trial a tender hearted jury acquitted her, while the Belgian got a smart sentence of penal servitude.

We afterwards learnt that with the cunning of her tribe, she had found out the scheme for the intended elopement, and thought it would be an excellent opportunity to carry out her long-cherished plan of bolting to the Continent with her scoundrelly foreign lover and as many of the jewels belonging to Lady and Miss Grimshaw as she could lay her hands on. I was the innocent cause of the frustration of her little scheme.

Every well-regulated girl will be pleased to hear that after this regrettable contretemps Cissie Grimshaw was married in church in the orthodox fashion, at St. Peter's, Eaton Square, and that the presents numbered over two hundred and fifty. The drawing-room suite in the Grimshaw house is still intact, and Sir George often refers to "my son-in-law, Sir Frederick Mostyn—the eminent K.C., you know."

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HOW SARSEVILLE ELECTED PARSON SOULE.

HISTORIC incidents are rare in the case of new townships. Sarseville, however, prides itself to-day upon being one of the few notable exceptions to the general rule of prevailing dullness and monotonous existence.

Sarseville is almost infantile in its newness. It certainly possesses within itself all the elements of future greatness and prosperity, in that it can and does boast of the usual urban institutions; *viz*: a bank; a town-hall; an opera-house, (not yet roofed in; or, as some say, visible above foundation line); several temples of refreshment for man and beast, (the terms being interchangeable, as per circumstance); and last, but not by any means least, a church—or rather *the* church.

Now, Sarseville nominally supports its one ecclesiastical organisation.

Every citizen is proud of it. The church, as a church, is so obviously a genuine guarantee to the outside world of their own moral and spiritual good condition; while the municipal officials being, all of them, church office-holders also, it naturally follows that local government, as understood in such young communities as Sarseville, is not only conducted irreproachably, and with the smallest amount possible of party strife, but is undeniably "a thing of beauty and a joy for ever."

On a certain evening in the late spring of this present year of grace, a young man, as attractive of form as of feature, was leaning lazily upon the palings that bordered in from the road, a small neatly-kept patch of garden ground, in the front of a pretty little shingle-roofed, weather-boarded frame house.

Asher B. Barte, road surveyor, mining engineer and general scientific expert, arrived but yesterday from Carthage City, over twenty miles away, the nearest available railroad point for Sarseville.

His presence here is in this connection: his mission, being, indeed, to preliminarise for a short loop line, that shall bring the lately-born township into close, and complete transit-touch with the rest of civilization.

He is staying at Deacon Entwhistle's, having brought with him a letter of introduction to that worthy from a mutual friend in New York.

Hardly had he set foot in the Deacon's dwelling, than he is conscious of some social, or domestic upheaval; something out of the ordinary going on.

There is a vacancy in the pulpit and pastorate of "Shiloh."

The late incumbent, dead nearly a month now, had, it seems, left behind him in Sarseville, an exceptionally large legacy of unrest and contention. He had not been, by any means, a "strong" man; but tact, a pleasing way with the women-folk, and a genial, conciliatory spirit as toward all men, had made him popular, except, perhaps, with the few who looked for something more stimulating than "milk" where their spiritual fare was concerned.

In the Deacon's house the deceased had been, when in life, a true *persona grata*; but to a great extent the excitement consequent upon the election of his successor has made his memory to be buried with his body.

The electors, (the vestral body of "Shiloh") are divided into two hostile camps.

The one, section advocate, with no uncertain sound of speech, and with much expenditure of printer's ink the claims of the Reverend Holofernes Brown, a minister at present out of commission, and resident at Carthage City.

Resident, that is to say, usually; the candidate being as a matter of fact, at this particular moment in Sarseville; on the spot as it were, to watch his own interests in the contest.

The other is in favour of an, as yet, unseen, although not altogether unknown individual, hailing from a little village, nestled away among the slopes and valleys of the distant "Catskills."

Deacon Soule, the proud father of the Reverend Caleb, is, naturally, the head and front; the life and heart of his son's cause; and the advent of young Asher Barte finds the struggle in full swing; each side doing its level best, and straining its resources to the utmost in its efforts to win a glorious and enduring victory.

While this explanation has been a'making, the young man has not been idle.

We left him in silent contemplation of the front garden of Arsinoe Smith's house, and we find him now in animated converse with a girl of about his own age, the Arsinoe aforesaid.

They appear to be on fairly intimate terms.

"And Caleb is coming to-night?" she says.

"Yes," replies Asher, "When I saw him three days ago, he told me that he should be here, at the latest, to-night, about this time."

"I am so glad!" she said eagerly, and yet quite unaffectedly, Her companion can see, however, by the faint face-flush, that her pulse quickens, as at the bidding of some maidenly emotion of more than everyday depth and intensity.

Asher Barte and Caleb Soule are so closely allied in the bonds of friendship that the former knows all about his chum's love for Arsinoe.

Two summers before it was, amid the sweet-scented pines that girdled their then respective homes, on the banks of Ohio, that they, mere boy and girl, plighted a troth that nothing short of death itself would ever dissolve.

When Arsinoe left her father's homestead to take up the duties of schoolmistress at Sarseville, Caleb was just about to start his ministerial career at Claverack.

Although letters had passed regularly between the pair, they had not once met since the parting at Woodside Ferry eighteen months ago.

It seemed, therefore, as if this visit of Asher Barte's to Sarseville was a rare opportunity not alone to let Arsinoe know the news of his near coming, but by the lips of his friend, to communicate such little thoughts and messages as could not well be prosaically written down.

Apart from the fact that Asher is an engaged man; happy in the possession of a good girl's love, Caleb knows his friend only too well, to doubt for a moment his trustworthiness as a messenger.

Arsinoe, on her own side the palings, looking the picture of content and loving anticipation, is evidently of the same opinion with regard to Asher Barte's good faith. Her estimate of Caleb's friend would do credit to Caleb himself.

Soon they fall to talking upon the one all-absorbing theme, that is agitating Sarseville throughout its length and breadth.

"I heard a strange rumour," says Asher, "on my way here from the Deacon's; nothing less than, in view of a possible difficulty in coming to an early decision on the question of the choice of candidates, that the matter should be settled by a game of poker, to be played by the appointed representatives of the two parties. It seems that a certain individual—

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known, I believe, in the neighbourhood as Deathery Dick—is responsible for the idea, and has succeeded in 'persuading' several members of either side. Of course it's scandalous, irreverent, in wretchedly bad taste, but what are you to do? Church 'office' doesn't necessarily imply church 'spirit.' I'm far from being a saint, I know, and I'm not a Sarseville citizen, but the first chance I have of getting a word in, I'll give the card-playing vestry gents my humble opinion on the subject, and it certainly won't be complimentary."

"Mr. Barte," said Arsinoe, gravely (she is a tall, upright girl, with a type of face upon which gravity sits well), "for Caleb's sake don't say or do anything until he comes. I feel sure that when he hears of this miserable method of conducting the election, he will protest vigorously. Caleb can be righteously angry, I know; and this is a case when a good man's wrath is not only justifiable, but even called for."

"Well, if Caleb doesn't come soon he'll be too late to stop 'em—for I understood that the thing was to be done this evening at old George Martin's."

"It can't be helped," says Arsinoe, "still, I do wish Caleb were here—right now."

"You've got your wish, Miss Arsinoe," Asher says, suddenly moving away from the fence, out into the road, looking down the latter toward an on-coming single-horse wagon, in which are two men, one of whom is energetically waving his hat to the pair awaiting him.

Caleb Soule, although a small man, and in direct physical contrast to his intended wife, has about him a dignity all his own.

Asher leaves his two friends to their confidences appointing to meet Caleb at his father's later on.

Arsinoe has been so long without a sight of her sweetheart, that she may be pardoned if she allows their own private concerns to take precedence of every other subject.

At last, however, she tells him; and what he thinks, and how he proposes acting only confirms her prophecy to Asher of what he would certainly feel and do.

"I'll go after Asher at once dear," he says, pausing a minute to think, "I'll find out exactly how the thing stands, and then—well—then, I'll have just one word with the electors; and accordingly as they listen to, or disregard what I have to say, so will be my course. I'm quite clear as to what is right in the matter; and if the vestry can't see it from my standpoint—why—there'll be a candidate the less, that's all."

A quarter of an hour later, Caleb Soule and his friend knock at the door of George Martin's house.

It is opened by old George himself, who, far from manifesting confusion, or a guilty consciousness of wrong-doing, beamed broadly and confidently upon the young men.

"Come in, Mr. Soule! Come in, passon! Ye're just in time. Oh, yes, for sure, yer friend's welcome. Come in, sir!"

Answering not a word, the two visitors follow the master of the house along a passage which terminates in a large, square, comfortably furnished parlour.

At the table sit eleven men, members all of them of "Shiloh" vestry. Old Martin's momentarily vacated chair completes the circle.

Two other persons sit chatting in undertones in a shadowy corner of the room, but no one, including the new-comers, appear to notice them, they are the Reverend Holofernes, and Deathery Dick, somewhat of an unholy combination, certainly, but what will you? Light and darkness do sometimes assimilate; and light is not always of even the average illuminating power.

There is Deacon Entwhistle, Deacon Brent, Sam Maynard, and three others, to represent the "Brown" faction, while the party in favour of Caleb Soule is championed by Deacon Smallway, Deacon Josh. Mearns, and a following of four active Church members.

On the table lies a scattered pack of cards, and a large basin, serving as a pool, quite respectably, (or disreputably?) filled with silver and paper money.

Caleb leaves his friend's side, after a keen inspection of everything and everybody, and smartly advances well within the circle of brilliant white light given out by a large hanging lamp, crowned with an enormous shade.

Before he can speak, Deacon Smallway rises heavily, (he is a big, gross, unwieldy man) and addresses him.

"Mr. Soule," he says, with just a suspicion of nervousness in his manner, "It is my pleasing duty as Senior Deacon of 'Shiloh' and also in my capacity of Chief Magistrate of Sarseville to announce to you your due Election to the Pastorship of this Congregation; and to invest you with all the rights, and ——"

"Hold, sir!" cried Caleb; his spare little figure drawn up to its full height; his eyes ablaze with indignation yet his voice quite stern and steady. "Hold, I say! I require answers to two questions of mine before another word is spoken upon the subject of the result of your so-called election of me to be your Pastor. First then, how did you arrive at your decision? Secondly, what is the meaning of these cards, and this bowl of money?"

Not a man speaks in reply; but the whole company of detected gamblers rise as one almost and endeavour, each on his own account, to shuffle towards the door.

Caleb bars the way.

"You shall go," he says, "when I have done, or rather I will myself leave you to continue your game. You have this day disgraced the church in this place. To expect that I should accept an election brought about by such means, and by such hands, is an insult alike to me and to Him whom I humbly seek to serve. I repudiate your choice of me! I will none of it! and will return whence I came, praying only that you may come to a better mind each and every one of you, and render yourselves worthier in the future to fill the offices to which you have been severally called."

They fell away from him, shamefaced, cowed and silent, as he turned the handle of the door, and passed with his friend, out into the night.

* * * * *

There is reason to believe that a better state of things prevails to-day in Sarseville.

For a few months Holofernes Brown, as sole residuary candidate, officiated as minister of "Shiloh," but new men, new manners came in, and when a complete sweep was eventually made of the old vestry, that body's spiritual nominee was incontinently included in the notice to quit.

But Caleb Soule did not return to Sarseville on the improvement of matters.

Remaining with his old congregation, who were only too glad to have him back amongst them a brief while, he lately has been offered and has accepted the pastorate of a prosperous church in the Empire City.

Both he and Arsinoe, his wife, are happy in their own quiet way, he because he know his duty and does it; and she—well—because she knows him to be always right, and rejoices exceedingly in the knowledge.

Ralph Enderby.

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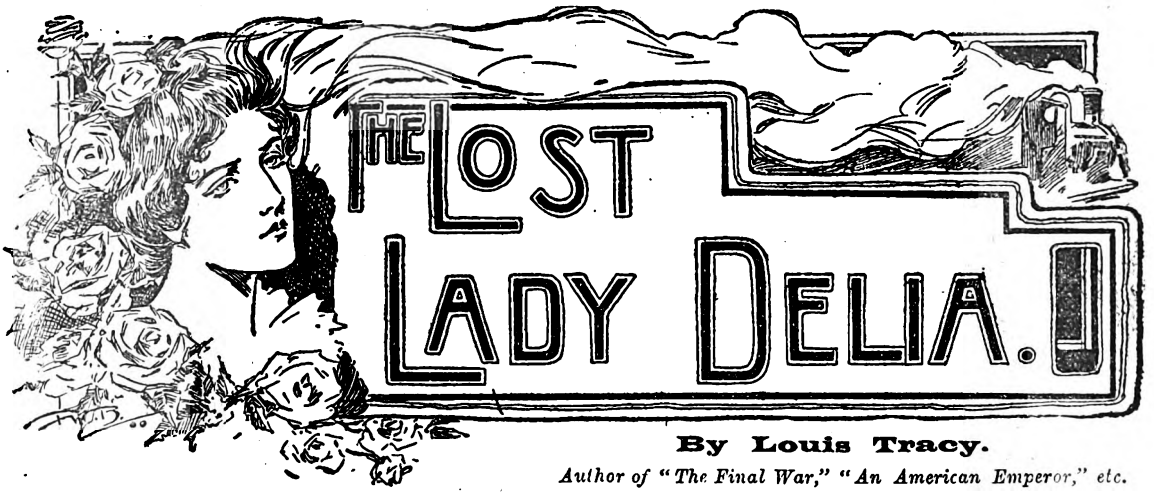

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

CHAPTER XXIX. (*continued*).

My father's succession to the title and estates changed all that. We quitted Surrey for Yorkshire, and Wensley House, Portman Square, was a step upwards from the barrack-like building which so admirably suited Mr. Childe's requirements.

When I was at Sandhurst General Mensmore got into difficulties. He quitted Surrey, and we gradually lost sight of him and his children. Afterwards I knew that he struggled on for a few years, placed his son in the Army, and then came a complete collapse, ending in his death and the boy's resignation of his commission. Of Gwendoline Mensmore's whereabouts I knew nothing. Her memory never quitted me, but the new interests in my life dulled it. I imagined that I could laugh at a childish infatuation.

Then I married. I did so in obedience to my father's wishes, and Lady Delia was, I suppose, an ideal wife—far too ideal for a youngster of my lower intellectual plane. I now know that I never had any real affection for her. I was always somewhat awed by her loftier aspirations. My interests lay in racing, hunting, sports generally, and having what I defined as "a good time." She, though an excellent horsewoman, and in every sense an admirable hostess, thought Newmarket vulgar, treated Ascot as a social necessity, and turned up her eyebrows at me when I failed to see any utility in schemes for the reclamation of the submerged tenth.

Thus, though we never quarrelled, we gradually drifted apart. She knew she bored me if she asked me to inspect a model dwelling; I knew she hated the people who were the companions of a coaching tour or a week at Goodwood. Unfortunately, we were not blessed with offspring. Had it been otherwise, we might have found a common object of interest in our children.

Insensibly we agreed to a separate existence. We lived together as friends rather than as husband and wife. We parted without regret and met without cordiality. Do not think we were unhappy. If our marriage was not bliss, it was at least comfortable. I think my wife was proud of my successes on the turf in a quiet kind of way, and I certainly was proud of her and of the high reputation she enjoyed amongst all classes of society. I even reverenced her for it, and I well knew that the enthusiastic receptions given to us by our Yorkshire tenantry were not due to my efforts in their behalf, but to hers.

So we lived for nearly six years, and so we might have continued for sixty had I not met Gwendoline Mensmore again, under vastly changed circumstances. She was a chorus-girl in a variety theatre, earning a poor living under wretched conditions. I discovered the fact by mere chance.

I met her, and she told me her story—how she had married a man named Hilmer, whom her father had trusted, and whom she believed to be able to save them from ruin. Then the crash came. Her father died; her husband, also broken down financially, took to drink and ill-treated her; her brother was swallowed up somewhere in the Far West. She had no alternative but to live apart from her husband and try to support herself by the first career that suggests itself to a young, talented, and beautiful woman. But she was already tired of the stage and its distasteful surroundings. Her nature was too delicate for the rude friendships of the dressing-room. She shuddered at the thought of a mild carousal in a bar when the labours of the night were ended.

In a word, were I differently constituted, were she cast in more common mould, there was apparently ready to hand all the material for a vulgar *liaison*.

My respect for my wife, however, no less than Mrs. Hilmer's fine disposition, saved both of us from folly. Yet I could not leave her exposed to the exigencies of a life in which she was rapidly becoming disillusioned. Away in the depths of my heart I knew that this sweet woman was my true mate, separated from me by adverse chance. There was nothing unfair to Delia in the thought. Were she questioned at any time, I suppose, she must have admitted that we were, in some respects, as ill-matched a couple as we were well-matched in others. You will say that I understood but little of feminine nature—nothing at all of my wife's.

How best to help Mrs. Hilmer—that was the question. It was at this stage I made the initial mistake to which I can, too late, trace a host of succeeding misfortunes. I did not consult my wife. Trying now to analyse my reasons for this lamentable error of judgment I imagined that it arose from some absurd disinclination on my part to admit that I went to the stage-door of a theatre to inquire about the identity of a young woman whom I had recognised from the front of the house.

Don't you see, my dear Brett, it is almost as bad to fear your wife as to suspect her.

As, at that time, my own life was free from the slightest cloud of sorrow, I took a keen interest in the troubles of Mrs. Hilmer, and I amused myself by playing, in her behalf, the part of a modern magician. As I felt intuitively that she would resent any direct attempt on my part to place funds at her disposal, I found a great deal of harmless fun in helping her with her consent but without her actual knowledge.

I am, as you know, a rich man. At this hour I cannot

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tell you my available assets to within £100,000. Altogether I must be worth nearly a million sterling—yet my money cannot purchase me another day's existence such as I would tolerate. Strange, is it not?

Well, the close of the year before last was a period of unexampled activity on the Stock Exchange, and, by way of a joke, I made some purchases on Mrs. Hilmer's account, with the intention of pretending to pay myself out of the profits, whilst handing her such balances as might accrue. She is a shrewd woman, and quick at figures, so I might have exper enced some difficulty in deceiving her. But the mad record of the past twelve months was in no wise belied by its inception. My purchases were those of a man inspired by the Goddess of Fortune. Stocks that I bought commenced suddenly to inflate. I astounded my brokers by the manner in which I ferreted out neglected bonds, mines which struck the mother lode next week, railway companies whose directors were even then secretly conspiring to water the stock.

Mrs. Hilmer became infected with the craze like myself. Twice we plunged heavily in American Rails and came out triumphantly. To end this part of my story, after five months of excitement I had contrived not only to swell my own deposits to a large extent but I had secured on Mrs. Hilmer's account a sufficient quantity of reliable stock to her in an average income of £1,500 per annum.

My greatest difficulty was to get Mrs. Hilmer to break off from the habit of speculation once she had contracted it. I found that she perused the City prices in the late editions of the evening papers with the same eagerness that a bookmaker looks for the starting prices of the day's races. By the exercise of firmness and tact I was able to stop her from further dealings.

At the close of this period I need hardly say that two things had happened. Mrs. Hilmer and I were fast friends, with common objects and interests in life; and, concurrently, the ties between Delia and myself had loosened still more.

I had also carelessly made another blunder. Under the pretence that secrecy was requisite for Stock Exchange transactions, I had persuaded Mrs. Hilmer to allow me to pass under the name of Colonel Montgomery.

Mrs. Hilmer, of course, was now able to live in comparative luxury. I came to regard her house as an abode of rest. I was more at home in her drawing-room than in my own house. She often spoke to me of my wife, and obviously wished to know her, but here I did a cowardly thing. I represented my married existence as far less comfortable than it really was, and gradually Mrs. Hilmer ceased all allusion to Delia. She misunderstood our relations. I knew it, and did not explain. Not a very worthy proceeding for a man whose sense of honour is so keen that he prefers death to disgrace. But one can deceive no other so easily as oneself.

Occasionally, when opportunities offered, we went out together. It was foolish, you will say, and I agree with you. If folly were not pleasant it would not be so fashionable. But to this hour the relations between us were those only of close friendship. Never in my life have I addressed her by other than her married name, never have I touched her arm save by way of casual politeness.

I really think I flattered myself upon my superior virtues. I could see all the excellence but none of the stupidity of my behaviour.

About this time Mrs. Hilmer's husband died. Thenceforth she became slightly reserved in her manner. When life was a defiance she fought convention, but with safety came prudence. In fact, she told me quite candidly that my frequent visits to her house would certainly be ill-construed if they became known. I was seeking for a pretext to re-introduce her to her own set in Society when a double catastrophe occurred.

My wife discovered, as she imagined, that I was clandes-

THAT "LITTLE DISH."

How we do like a little dish of something nice, served up hot!

Charles Lamb would have sold his shirt for a tender suckling pig done to a turn. Doctor Johnson used to say that a dish of tea was the most fragrant of life's beverages. "Why, what am I a-thinking of, I shall forget my own name next," said Toby Veck, "It's tripe—the best tripe ever stewed." And his daughter Meg smilingly gave him the basket, in which reposed a hot steaming dish of his favourite meat.

"My wife prepared nice, dainty little dishes to tempt my appetite," said Mr. Henry White, of that beautiful Devon town, Torquay, "but somehow I seemed to have lost all inclination for food, and after sitting at the table trying to swallow a little, I used to say to her:

"'It's no use. I can't eat it. You may as well take it away.' This sort of thing soon told a tale, for one can't go without food for long without losing strength. Seeing my condition, a friend strongly advised me to try Seigel's Syrup. He said it had cured him, and might do me good.

"My appetite no longer needed coaxing. I could eat well-nigh everything that was put before me. Each dose seemed to give me life and vigour. To-day, no matter what ails me, Seigel's Syrup puts me right."

That "little dish" in fact, is once again the favourite.

"Some three months ago my wife got thoroughly run down. For over a fortnight she could keep nothing on her stomach." Mr. Henry White, when certifying to the truth of this on September 13th, 1900, at his house, 10 Pediford Terrace, Torquay, Devon, does not say what was the matter with his wife.

We know why the "little dish" failed to digest, and we quote the words of the famous physician to prove it: "In the nervous and irritative form of dyspepsia, this is a very prevailing symptom. As is also a sensation of sinking, as if the stomach required food, due to the fact that the food has left the stomach in a half-digested condition.

Who could enjoy a "little dish," when the food could be but half-digested? "She was troubled a good deal with wind, and seemed to be losing her strength. I fetched a bottle of Mother Seigel's Syrup from Holloway's Drug Stores, and she commenced taking it. In a short time she was quite well again." H'm, some men would now sell their shirt for a bottle of this remedy.

This essay, then, upon "little dishes" proves that while man and woman can in no wise *always* relish that favourite dish, yet a cure is ready to hand. One that has served men and women alike for more than the past thirty years.

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tinely occupied with another woman, and Mrs. Hilmer's brother returned from America.

It will best serve my hurried narrative if I relate events exactly as they happened, and not as they look in the light of subsequent knowledge.

Mensmore was naturally astounded to find his sister so well provided for, and gratefully accepted the help she gave him towards resuscitating his own scattered fortunes. But it did not occur to either of us that he would take the ordinary view of the queer bond existing between us, and I shall never forget his rage when he found out that I was not known to his sister's servants by my right name. It was an awkward position for all three. He was loth to allege that which we did not feel called upon to deny. But between him and me there was a marked coolness, arising from suspicion on his part and resentment on mine, coupled, I must add, with an unquiet consciousness that his attitude was not wholly unreasonable.

Mrs. Hilmer and he discussed the matter several times. He urged that this compromising friendship should be discontinued. She—a determined woman when her mind was made up—fought the suggestion on the ground of its unfairness, though, like myself, she would have been glad of any accident that might alter the position of affairs.

He interpreted her opposition to different motives. Finally, as his financial position was a dangerous one, as we afterwards learnt, and he despaired of setting things straight in Raleigh Mansions—judging them from his own point of view—he resolved to leave England again.

And now I come to the night of November 6.

It was, as you will remember, a foggy and unpleasant day. I had some business in the City which detained me until darkness set in. I had not seen Mrs. Hilmer for two days, so I resolved to drive to Sloane Square—travelling by the Underground was intolerable in such weather—and have tea with her.

I did not know then that she had gone with her maid to Brighton—intending to return that evening. It was a sudden whim she told me subsequently, and she had not even informed her servants of her intention.

The pavements in the City were slimy with the dampness of the fog, and as an empty four-wheeler passed through Cornhill I hailed it, a most unusual choice on my part. The cabman, I noticed, was fairly elevated, but as these fellows often drive better when drunk than sober, I simply told him to be careful, and jumped in. I reached Sloane Square all right, and detained the cab for my intended journey home in time for dinner.

At the door of Mrs. Hilmer's flat I met the cook and housemaid, both going out to do some shopping, probably, in the spare hour before it was time to prepare for dinner.

They knew me well, of course, and admitted me to the drawing-room, telling me that Mrs. Hilmer was out, but would surely return very shortly.

I had not been in the room a minute before the sharp double knock of a telegraph messenger brought the coachman, whom the girls left in charge of the house, to the door, and I startled the man by appearing in the hall, as he did not know of my presence.

"What is it, Simmonds?" I said, as I correctly guessed the message to be from Mrs. Hilmer.

"The missus is in Brighton, sir," he answered. "She wants the carriage to meet her at Victoria at seven o'clock. It's six now, and I ought to go round to the stables at once, but both these blessed girls have just gone out. I'm in a fair fix."

"No fix at all," I said. "I want to see Mrs. Hilmer, so I will wait here until she arrives—or, at all events, till the servants come back."

The man scratched his head, but he could think of no better plan, so he, too, went off, and I was left alone, for the first time in my life, in Mrs. Hilmer's abode. It is the small events that govern our lives, Brett, not those that stand out prominently. The shopping expedition of a couple of servant girls, intent upon securing a new cap or a few yards of calico, brought about my wife's death, caused misery to many people, and ends, I sincerely hope, in my own speedy leap into oblivion.

I picked up a novel, "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," hit upon the terrible episode that culminates on Salisbury Plain, and was soon deeply interested, when another knock—this time an imperative summons long drawn out—caused me to hasten to the door.

I opened it, and in the dim light of the staircase landing did not for a second recognise the lady who stood outside.

Heaven help me, I was soon enlightened. My wife's voice was bitterly contemptuous as she said:

"You don't keep a footman, it appears, in your new establishment, Charles."

Had I been suddenly struck blind, or paralysed, I could not have been more dumfounded that I was at Delia's unexpected appearance. A thorough scoundrel might, perhaps, have thought of the best thing to say. I blurted out the worst.

"What are you doing *here?*" I stammered when my tongue recovered its use.

"No doubt you resent my appearance," she cried in a high shrill tone I had never before heard from her, "but I shall not trouble you further. I merely came to confirm with my own eyes what my ears refused to entertain. Now I am satisfied."

She half-turned with the intention of reaching the street, but rendered desperate by the absurdity of my position, I gripped her arm and pulled her forcibly into the entrance-hall, closing and bolting the door behind us.

"You have seen too much not to see more," I cried. "I will not allow you to ruin both our lives by a mere suspicion."

She was in a furious temper, but her sense of propriety—for she did not not know that the servants' quarters were empty—restrained her until we had both entered the drawing-room.

Then she burst upon me with a torrent of words.

CHAPTER XXX.

Sir Charles Lyle Ends His Narrative.

"A mere suspicion, indeed!" she said, and there was that in her voice which warned me that I had better try unarmed to control a tigress than a wife who deemed herself wronged; "these are pretty *suspicions* that surround you. A house tenanted by another woman where you are evidently master! A mistress who left the ranks of the ballet, or something of the sort, living in luxury on means supplied by you! A married woman who casts off her husband with her poverty, taking up with a paramour and riches! Do you think you can blind my eyes further? I have the most convincing proofs of your infamy. Do not imagine that on any specious pretext I will condone your conduct. I despise you from the depths of my heart. Henceforth I will strive to forget your very existence."

"Delia," I said, and if she had not been blinded with passion she must have been affected by my earnestness, "will you not listen to me?"

"Why should I? What respect have you shown to me that I should now seem even to accept your excuses?"

"I appeal to you not to do anything in anger. You have good reason to be enraged with me. I only ask you to suspend your final judgment. Hear what I have to say, take time for deliberation, for further inquiry, and then condemn me to any punishment you think fit."

She did not answer me. Her eyes were roving round the comfortable room and taking stock of every indication of poor Mrs. Hilmer's artistic aptitude. The place was eminently home-like, much more so than our elegant mansion in Portman Square, and my wife noted the fact with momentarily increasing bitterness. Yet I essayed my

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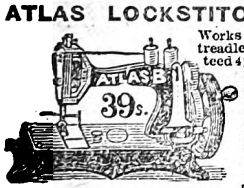

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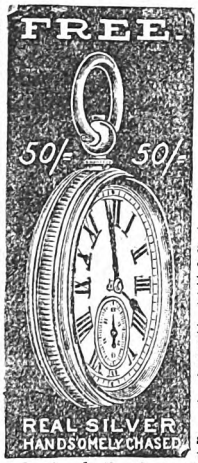

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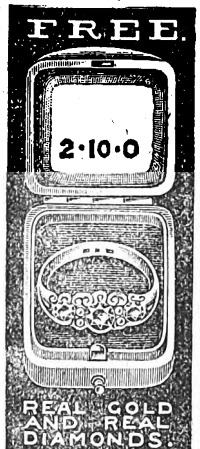

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desperate task with failing nerve and terrible consciousness of a bad cause.

"Notwithstanding all that you have seen and heard," I said, "I am not guilty of the crime you accuse me of. Mrs. Hilmer is an old friend of mine, whom I helped from a state of misery to one of comfort and comparative happiness. She is as pure-minded in thought, as spotless in character, as you are yourself. You are doing her a grevious injustice by doubting the relations between her and me. If you only knew her——"

My wife laughed scornfully.

"Pray spare yourself, Charles. I have never seen you so interested before, but you lie badly nevertheless."

"I do not lie. Before Heaven I am telling you the truth."

"You are even willing to perjure yourself, *Colonel Montgomery?*"

My poor armour was ill-fitted for this stroke. I suppose I must have flinched before it, for she went on:

"You see I am well posted. My detectives have done their work well. Oh, Heaven, that I should ever have learnt to love a vile wretch like you. I thought you were fond of me, at least. I tried hard to bend my own wishes to sympathy with yours, and I dreamt even of ultimate success. I knew you did not care much for me, but the devotion of a slave has at times been rewarded with the affection of her master. Fortunately I am a slave by choice. It only required experience to break my bonds, and you have supplied the experience."

For the first time in my life did it dawn upon me that my self-contained and haughty wife harboured other thoughts for me than a sentiment of respect for an indulgent and easily-controlled husband. It was a shock to me, a deeper humiliation than she dreamt of. How could I expiate the past, wipe out this record of error and folly, but not of ill do ng, and live happily with her so long as Providence was pleased to spare us? Whilst these things ran through my brain she suddenly turned on me.

"You fear exposure in the law courts! You dread your name figuring in a Society scandal! How little you know me. You naturally compare me by your own contemptible standard. I left your house to-night determined never to return to it should I find you here, as in all probability, I was told, would be the case. I will go to my sister until I have determined upon my future life. You, at least, will never by my desire see or hear from me again. Thus far, I presume, I will fall in with your views."

She would have passed me, but I held fast to the inside of the door. If once she got away from me I might never be able to set affairs even tolerably right. Better, I deemed, have one trying scene in the hope that she would calm down in the face of facts than allow her to carry the quarrel to her relatives and strengthen her attitude by their natural support.

"Delia," I said, "you shall not go."

"How can you dare to detain me?" she shrieked, and the glint in her eyes showed how thoroughly her passions were aroused.

"You can separate from me if you will. I shall not venture to hinder you. But I swear that you will not do this rash act without full knowledge. I tell you you must remain here. When you leave this house you do so in my company."

"And why am I to be kept a prisoner?"

"Mrs. Hilmer will return in less than an hour. You have sought this meeting yourself. Very well. You shall have it. When your charges have been thoroughly thrashed out in the presence of Mrs. Hilmer and myself I will then accompany you where you will, and leave you under the protection of your sister or any one else you choose should you still persist in leaving me."

Of course, my action was unwise to the last degree. But remember, Brett, that during these last awful five minutes I had seen a side of my wife's nature that had been hidden from me for six long years. And I was a man suddenly plunged into a raging sea, drifting helplessly I knew not whither. All that consumed me was a wild desire for such scant justice as I deserved. I had erred, but my faults were not those my wife alleged against me.

If she was angry before she was now absolutely uncontrollable.

"What?" she screamed. "Remain to meet your—your mistress? Never, whilst I have life."

She flung herself upon me so suddenly that she tore me away from the door. She was a strong and athletic woman, and I suppose she expected some resistance, for she used such force as to drag me forward into the middle of the room, overturning a chair in the effort. I was so utterly taken by surprise that I yielded to her violence more completely than she expected.

She staggered, let go her hold, and fell heavily backwards, tripping over the fallen chair. I made a desperate attempt to save her, but only caught the end of a fur necklet, and it tore off like a spider's web.

Her body crashed against a Venetian fender, and her head came with awful force against a sort of support for the fire-irons that stood up a foot from the ground.

Then she rolled over, her eyes and face undergoing a ghastly change, and instantly became, as I thought, unconscious.

I knelt beside her, raising her head with my right hand, and brokenly beseeching her to speak to me, when I would at once do anything she asked me. But she gave no sign of animation. In a frenzy of despair, I forced myself to examine her injuries, and my heart nearly stopped beating when I discovered that a large piece of iron had been driven into her brain through the back of the head.

I knew in a moment that she was dead. Although I have not had much experience of that terrible epoch in the human being, I have seen far too much of death in animal life not to know that she who had been my honoured and respected wife now lay before me a mere soulless entity—a symbol only of the splendid vital creature who, a minute earlier, was angrily protesting against the supposed faithlessness of her mate.

Looking back now upon the events of that fateful night, I marvel at the appalling coolness which came to my aid as soon as I realised the extent of the misfortune which had befallen both Delia and myself. I can fully understand what is meant by the callousness of certain criminals or the indifference to inevitable death betrayed by Eastern races. No sooner was I quite assured that my wife was dead—dead beyond hope or doubt—than I regained the use of my reasoning faculties in the most marvellously cold-blooded degree.

The actual difficulties of my position were enormous. I arraigned myself before a judge and jury, and saw clearly that every circumstance which contributed towards Delia's suspicions in the first instance were now magnified a hundredfold by the manner and scene of her death.

Before me, in ghostly panorama, moved the dread crowd of witnesses against me, the degradation of my family, the bitter and vengeful feelings of my wife's relatives, the suffering of poor unconscious Mrs. Hilmer, the whole avalanche of horror and misery which this unfortunate accident had precipitated upon every person who claimed my relationship or friendship.

My mental attitude was quite altruistic. Could I have undone the past I would have cheerfully undergone a painful and protracted death forthwith.

But no possible atonement on my part would restore Delia to life. I knew it was quite improbable that I should be convicted of murdering her, strong as the circumstantial testimony against me must be. The mere legal consequences did not, however, weigh with me for a second. From that awful hour I felt that I was doomed personally. My only thought was to seek oblivion, not only for myself, but for all whom Delia's death might in any way affect.

(To be concluded.)

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

A letter reaches me from "Reggie," bemoaning the "hard, humdrum spirit of the times. All the romance and adventure which used to make life interesting," he says, "have passed away, swept out of existence by our much-vaunted advance of civilization. Nowadays, one works all day, and, work being over, proceeds to *kill* the remaining hours. There is nothing else for it, for beyond the stern necessity of earning one's daily bread, existence seems to have no other serious object."

"Reggie" seems to be in a bad way. Having no knowledge of him beyond that to be gathered from the above letter, I cannot say whether he has been making an indiscreet meal of muffins and lobster salad, or whether he has been jilted. In either event such ideas as he expresses would be the natural symptoms.

Utterly false are these ideas, and "Reggie" should, Mrs. Dombey-wise, "make an effort" to shake them off.

It is a commercial age, I, of course, admit, and there are certain grim facts and duties that must be faced. But, after all, life is pretty much what we make it. There is plenty of romance and interesting adventure if we only look for it.

Cultivate a hobby, "Reggie"; collect stamps, or buy a camera. It's astonishing what a lot either will do for a man.

❦❦❦

Of all hobbies, reading is probably the most general, and most capable of conferring pleasure. A good, well-written novel is an antidote to "that tired feeling." It takes the reader out of his own life, and in telling him of the experiences of fictitious characters, broadens his mind, and adds to his knowledge of human nature.

Which remarks bring, by a natural process, the remembrance that I have a treat in store for you readers, in the shape of a new serial story. As I told you last week, it is called

"The Fate of Michael Standridge,"

is written by Mr. Headon Hill, and is a novel of intense interest.

It will begin the week after next, in our great Easter Holiday Number. Be quite sure that you don't miss it.

In connection with Postcard Competition, I made a promise last week, which I here redeem:

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THERE

are lots of queer people in the world—queer in manner, speech, clothes, or method of life. We want to hear about some of them. Jot down on a post-card a short description of any peculiar man or woman that you have ever seen or heard of, and address it to

"PECULIAR,"

"Short Stories" Offices,
Henrietta Street,
Strand, W.C.

One Guinea will be sent to the Competitor who is adjudged by the Editor to have sent in the best. Attempts must reach us by Tuesday, April 9th, 1901.

There is no mistake about it, my friend the editor of the Big Budget is a real humourist. Here is a story told to me about him:

A benevolent looking gentleman entered the office, and drawing out a concealed document, said to the editor:

"I am soliciting help for a gentleman of refinement and intelligence. He is sadly in need of money, but he is too proud to let the public know it."

"You don't say so," said the editor, with animation.

"I am hopeful of securing quite a handsome little sum."

"You say this man is very intelligent, highly cultivated, and all that sort of thing?"

"That's just the kind of man he is."

"And too proud to beg?"

The visitor nodded.

"My dear friend, I appreciate your delicacy. You have described my condition precisely, but I had no idea I had enlisted your sympathy so strongly that you would take up a collection. It's all right. Just as soon as you get ten or fifteen pounds together, bring it to me, and I'll give you a receipt. Heaven bless you, my noble friend," and he gently pushed the visitor, who expected to tap the editor for a contribution, out into the street, where he, after gazing around in a dazed sort of way, kept on in his mission of mercy.

"One good turn deserves another," remarked the editor, as he resumed his seat. "The man came to help me out, and I helped him out."

Oh, yes! Old Mr. B. B. is a humourist.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 4,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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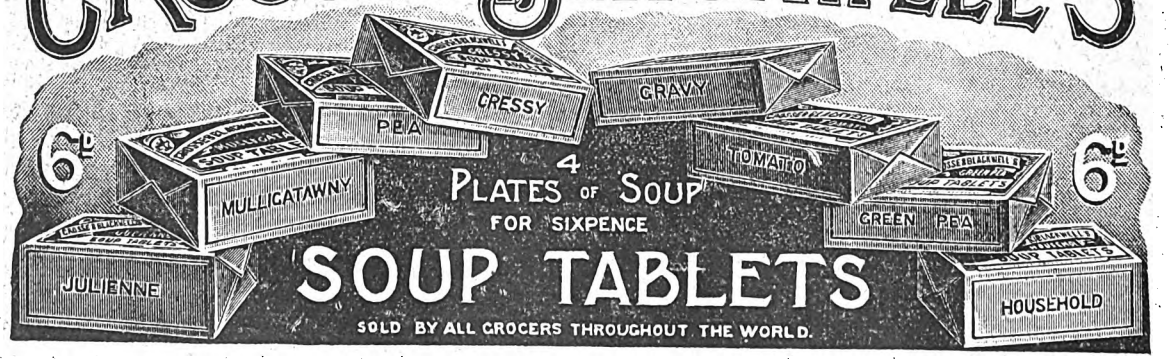

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 640.] For the Week Ending April 6th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

A Keeper of Secrets

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Being Days in the Professional Life of the late Mr. Hugo Pontifex, the Famous West-end Solicitor.

To those who had only met him casually in Society, the late Mr. Pontifex was a good-tempered mystery. Bluff, handsome, and, in spite of his middle-age, a little of a dandy, he seemed the last man in the world to deserve his reputation, which was that of the keenest, most audacious, and unerring of family lawyers. Fair-haired, and powerful as an athlete, his striking appearance was increased by his eyes, one of which was grey and one blue.

In reality, however, Hugo Pontifex had a wide and almost exclusively aristocratic practice. He seldom briefed a barrister, seldom set foot in a court of justice, but single handed he hunted down, captured, and safely buried mystery after mystery of terrible import to Mayfair and Belgravia.

An expert in strangling scandal, he lived a life of enthralling interest, and died a rich man. When his executors went through his papers they found nothing to satisfy their curiosity, though plenty to excite it. Hugo Pontifex knew the value of fire—and the dangers of ink. But from time to time he related to the writer, who enjoyed a certain measure of his confidence, the incidents which form the basis of the following stories. In speaking of these strange fragments of drama, Mr. Pontifex himself employed fictitious names, the present author being left to guess vainly at the identity of the genuine actors.

THE CLIENT IN THE PINK MASK.

ARRIVING in St. James' Street one pleasant forenoon at the height of a brilliant season, Mr. Pontifex found, halted by the kerb near the entrance to the old-fashioned stucco block which contained his offices, a gleaming brougham with a coroneted crest on the panel. The eagle glance of the lawyer rested momentarily upon the aristocratic symbol—it was that of an earl.

Mr. Pontifex, returning to his own thoughts, strode out of the May sunshine and passed in at the gloomy door labelled: "Hugo Pontifex, Solicitor."

The lawyer's clerk rose at his chief's dry "Good morning," and followed the latter into his private apartment, where Mr. Pontifex was already sorting his correspondence.

"The Earl of Tarbet is in the waiting-room, sir," he observed deferentially, using the soft, even tones characteristic of those who are slightly deaf, "he has been here for some while. He wished me to say that he would be glad if you could see him immediately on your arrival. He has another gentleman with him, sir."

Hugo Pontifex looked meditatively from the window at the tall roans and the glittering enamel of the carriage that had previously arrested his attention. The name which had just been pronounced was absolutely unfamiliar to him, but his expression did not betray the fact. He noticed that there was some degree of excitement in the usually staid demeanour of his clerk. Yet it was against Mr. Pontifex's principles to question a subordinate.

"Show them in at once," he ordered curtly. His assistant withdrew—deaf as he was, he had no difficulty in hearing the lawyer's crisp syllables.

Mr. Pontifex sat down and concluded the hasty analysis of his morning mail. The clerk had omitted to latch the door leading to the general office—it swung silently ajar to admit a couple of persons; one, handsome, youthful, almost boyish; the other, middle-aged, gaunt and stooping.

At the sight of his visitors Hugo Pontifex sprang up, for once startled out of his self-possession. The elder of the two wore a mask—a pink silk mask, covering his face from throat to forehead.

The younger man crossed the threshold, guiding his companion. The solicitor perceived that the dark orbs, visible through the aperture of the mask, were false—his gaunt and stooping client was blind!

"Mr. Pontifex," explained the junior of the newcomers, "this is Lord Tarbet, I am Lord Charles Everton. Lord Tarbet wishes to consult you alone; if he should want me, or when you have finished your talk, pray let me know, I shall be in the waiting-room." And, having made this courteous intimation, he piloted his charge to a seat, bowed to Hugo Pontifex and left the lawyer *tête-à-tête* with his singular client of the pink mask.

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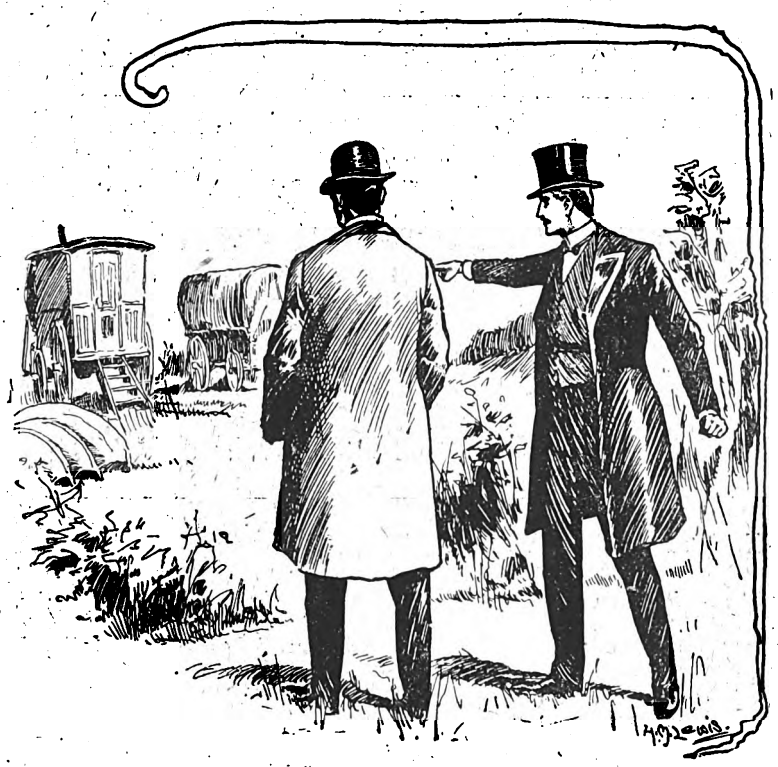
Mr. Pontifex lifted his chair into the neighbourhood of the blind man's.

"I am pleased to meet you, Lord Tarbet," he said, "I trust I may prove of service to you."

"Doubtless," answered a grave voice, muffled behind the unmoving mask, "yet, it is possible that, when you have learnt the circumstances upon which I seek your advice, even you will despair of aiding me."

"I shall be better able to judge of that, Lord Tarbet, when I have heard what you have to tell me," retorted the solicitor briefly.

"That is so," admitted his mysterious client. "Mr. Pontifex, unlikely as it may appear, I am but forty-six years of age; the late earl and I were second cousins.



"The brown caravan is my darling's prison. Shall we carry it by storm?"

A quarter of a century ago I was a young Shropshire squire with two good lives between me and the Tarbet title. I had wooed, won and, by stealth, married a pretty girl of humble station, an orphan, a certain Hilda Lessing. She had a sister Naomi, they were of gipsy blood on their mother's side. Their father had been a cottager upon a local estate."

Lord Tarbet paused and put his left palm abruptly to his breast. A shuddering sigh escaped him, but he went on determinedly.

"I had removed Hilda into Cornwall; Naomi was not informed of her sister's whereabouts, or of our marriage. We had one child, a girl—Florence we called her. By the time the child knew its alphabet, I had grown weary of its mother."

He hesitated and poised his masked head as if to listen.

"You can guarantee us secure from eavesdroppers?" he asked significantly.

"My clerk is deaf," was the reply; "and nothing less than the noise of a pistol shot would penetrate these walls."

Lord Tarbet made a gesture of comprehension.

"Also," he resumed; "I had moved a step higher in the Tarbet succession, and being a reputed bachelor, had come to be considered eligible. To crown all I had fallen in love with a rich and pretty woman. In this quandary I decided—you are a lawyer, Mr Pontifex, and I spare you excuses—to rid myself of Hilda. Let me get over the worst in a breath—I—I murdered her."

The fingers that had been pressed upon the speaker's bosom clutched it in apparent agony. Lord Tarbet snatched something from a vest-pocket, slipped it into his handkerchief, and squeezed it.

There was a faint sound—a species of tiny explosions. The Earl held the crumpled linen to his nostrils, gasping a few phrases of reassurance.

"I shall soon recover," he murmured, "nitrate of emyl keeps me alive—I have angina pectoris, spasm of the heart; don't summon Everton."

Hugo Pontifex scrutinized the writhing figure in the pink mask. At length Lord Tarbet steadied his shaking frame.

"What was I saying?" he queried weakly, "yes, I remember, that I murdered Hilda. I visited her, secretly, in Cornwall—where at any rate, I was only known, except to Hilda, by an alias—took her for a stroll on the cliffs one night, and brought about an—an accident. The horrible business done, I left the district by a circuitous route. Hilda was picked up at the foot of the precipice, not, as I had expected, dead, but dying. She was able to state, in proper legal form, that she had been pushed over the cliff by her husband, but, strangely enough, did not reveal my real identity. Yet, she had Naomi telegraphed for, and, as I gathered subsequently, told her everything."

The Earl shook the glass film of the burst capsule out of his handkerchief. The paroxysm was over.

"The object of this," pursued Lord Tarbet, "was not divulged to me until after Hilda's death and the practical abandonment of the search for her murderer. Then Naomi defined her position; so long as Florence, Hilda's child and mine, should be in Naomi's custody, Naomi herself was pledged not to disclose that it was I who had been her sister's husband. Hilda had not saved me for my own sake, but to avoid, if possible, throwing upon her daughter's life the shadow of a public trial. I willingly accepted the terms, indeed, I had never intended to claim the girl—it would have been putting my neck in the noose to dream of it."

Mr. Pontifex knitted his brows. He was in the habit of suspending his judgment where the conduct of a client was concerned. But he was passionately fond of children, and the earl's brutal candour revolted him.

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"Three months later," said Lord Tarbet, "I married again. Naomi read of it in the newspapers, and conceived, apparently, the idea of revenging her sister's wrongs, without violating the promise into which she had entered. Waylaying me in my own grounds, she flung a quantity of vitriol in my face and fled. Hence this mask!"

He undid one of the fastenings and raised a corner. The solicitor's nerves were of iron, yet he shrank from the spectacle.

"I dared not prosecute her," added the earl, restoring the pink silk screen, "and the affliction that condemned me to perpetual seclusion is still, thanks to my mask, an enigma to Society. Ultimately I became Earl of Tarbet, and, shortly afterwards, a widower again, my second wife dying childless. In my solitude a longing seized upon me for something to cherish and make much of. I remembered my little Florence, the child of the woman I had so foully wronged. I had her stolen, by trustworthy agents, from her grim guardian, Naomi Lessing, and sent abroad, temporarily, to school."

Mr. Pontifex's stern mouth softened; so Lord Tarbet was human!

"Naomi suspected me," proceeded the Earl, "and demanded an explanation. In the end I managed to hoodwink her; perhaps the realization of the wreck she had transformed me to abashed her. At all events, she seemed to believe me innocent of any share in Florence's disappearance. When I had evaded that peril I brought Florence home to Tarbet Castle, and guilty as I was, I taught her to love me, though she has never seen me unmasked. To-day she is a charming girl of nineteen, the betrothed of Lord Charles Everton, the sunshine of his existence and mine. To-day, alas! she is once more the prisoner of Naomi Lessing."

The lawyer sighed involuntarily—the final twist of the tangled skein had, he felt, been exposed.

"Kidnapped?" he inquired.

"She vanished into space," said Lord Tarbet, "a month past, from the park of my country-place near St. Albans. A detective employed by Everton—who knows nothing of my crime and its consequences—has tracked her with marvellous skill. He believes her to be the prisoner of a band of gipsies, at present encamped in Epping Forest. I told you the Lessings were of gipsy blood—I recognise Naomi in his description of Florence's keeper. He reported to us at my town house yesterday and Everton was wild to set off instantly, but I persuaded him to remain till I could see you. What shall I do—what can I do?"

"What do you most wish to do?" Hugo Pontifex rejoined coolly; "protect yourself or secure your daughter's happiness?"

"Think only of Florence," intreated the Earl; "she loves Everton and he worships the ground she treads on. But do as we will we cannot preserve their happiness, Mr. Pontifex. Naomi will not break her promise to Hilda by parting with Florence, and if Everton invokes the law, he will but lay bare the story of my guilt."

He crushed another capsule into his handkerchief and inhaled the drug.

"Everton fancies my first wife died on the Continent, after a secret marriage," he confessed. "I must not delude myself that when he learns the hideous truth he will continue loyal to Florence, though her father should atone for his offence on the scaffold. Besides, he is a younger son; his family would ostracise him—Florence would become a social outcast."

"I am Lady Florence!" she gasped. "Don't leave me; I'm not mad!"

"Not if her father died honourably in his own house," answered the solicitor, with a quiet significance; "leaving the conduct of this case to some discreet negotiator."

Lord Tarbet stiffened suddenly in his seat; the mask rendered his visage as fixed as that of a statue, but his twitching fingers bore witness to his uncontrollable emotion.

"If Lady Florence," said Mr. Pontifex, "were to be reclaimed from Naomi Lessing, under a threat of police prosecution, and Naomi Lessing might be informed, with truth——" the solicitor lingered over the clause and repeated it—"with truth," he reiterated, "that you were dead, she could, I am sure, be induced to respect the peace of her sister's child."

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The Earl was trembling violently; his tongue moistened his dry lips, lending a strange air of life to the masked features.

"Go on," he faltered.

"There is no more to say," responded Mr. Pontifex. "You observed, I recollect, that your capsules kept you alive. In your place, I should lock up my capsules, say to-night."

Lord Tarbet got on to his feet; he was shuddering frightfully.

"You are a brave man," he stammered. "I will do it; it is a just reparation. Have me driven home and arrange with Everton to take what steps you will. Occupy him for the rest of the morning—I ask no longer."

He held out a tremulous hand.

"We shall not meet again," he said almost apologetically. Mr. Pontifex, touched by an impulse of pity, clasped the extended fingers. Then he summoned his clerk and sent for Lord Charles Everton.

"Take me to my carriage, Charlie," desired Lord Tarbet; "I shall not want you further than the pavement. Mr. Pontifex desires your company; he will go towards Epping with you, eh, Mr. Pontifex?"

"I think it will be best, Lord Tarbet," replied the solicitor.

Lord Charles' youthful countenance lit with joy.

"That is good!" he exclaimed; "do we start at once, Mr. Pontifex?"

"At once," said the lawyer, distinctly; "we shall probably get back early this afternoon."

The Earl turned his masked face towards them, the expressionless glass orbs shining in it.

"I will be ready for you," he answered; "come, Everton."

And leaning heavily on his companion's arm, the Earl of Tarbet passed out of the apartment.

From the window Mr. Pontifex watched the tall roans clatter off with the gleaming brougham. When Lord Charles returned to the room, the solicitor had substituted a morning-coat for his frock, slipped a grey raglan over it, and was donning a felt hat.

Thus equipped, his costume resembled that of his younger client. Mr. Pontifex ordered the inevitable hansom and they set out for Liverpool Street and the Great Eastern terminus.

By twelve they had walked from Chingford into Epping Forest, Lord Charles calculating their direction from the report of his astute detective. As the sun crossed the zenith they came on the gipsy encampment for which they had been searching. It consisted of a pair of caravans, with some low, basin-shaped huts, and appeared to be, for the moment, almost deserted.

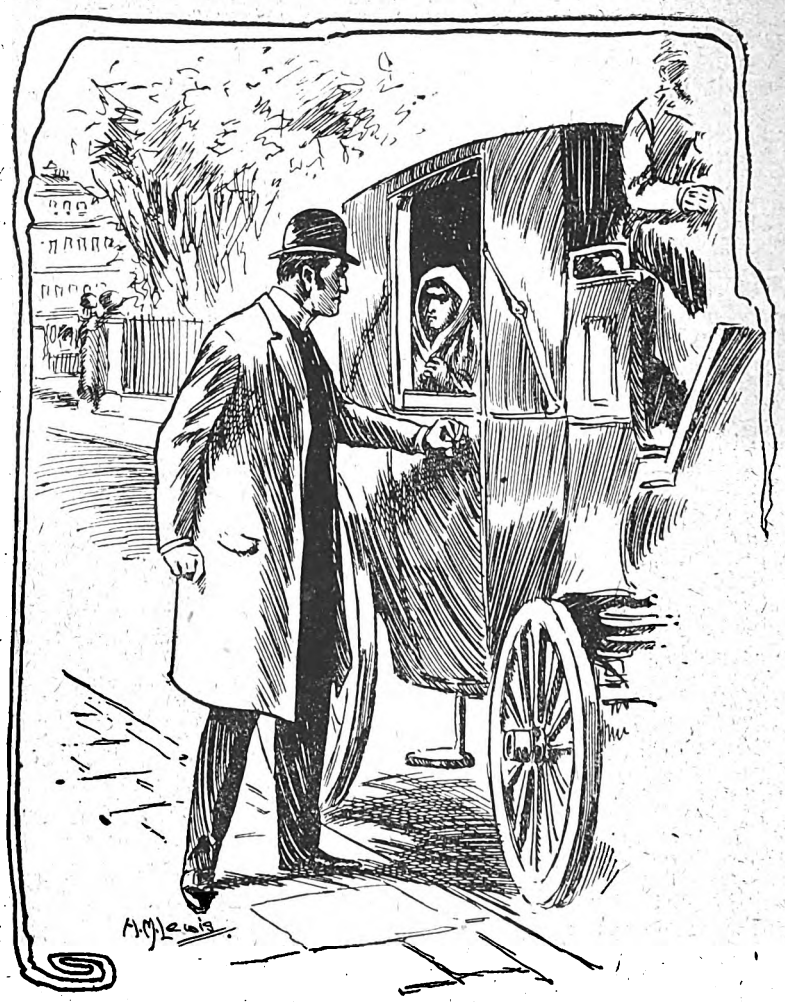
"If my man was not wrong," said Lord Charles "the brown caravan is my darling's prison. Shall we carry it by storm?"

Mr. Pontifex laid his strong palm on the young man's shoulder.

"Let me challenge the fortress," he advised; "Lord Charles, these gipsies, the Earl fears, have an old grudge against him, and so have struck at Lady Florence. He has intrusted to me certain facts that may enable me to—to pacify them. If I cannot do so I will call you to my assistance."

Without staying for an answer to this request, he strode up to the brown caravan, climbed the steps, and, with a formal tap at the glassed portal, entered.

It was tenanted by two seated women, one grey-haired and powerful, the other fair, slender and girlish. Both leapt up, the former with a cry of anger, the latter with a shriek of excitement.



"Woman!" said Pontifex, "your last card is trumped. Lord Tarbet is dead!"

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"I want Lady Florence, Lord Tarbet's daughter," said the solicitor, evading the elder woman, who sought to thrust him from the vehicle. The girl darted to his side and clung against him.

"I am Lady Florence!" she gasped; "don't leave me, I am not mad these clothes are not mine, she has dyed my face and hair. But I am Lord Tarbet's daughter all the same."

The lawyer opened the small exit behind him—forcing the grey-haired fury back with knee and elbow—and whistled; Lord Charles came running. Lady Florence saw him and stumbled down the rickety ladder into his arms. Mr. Pontifex shut the door.

"Naomi Lessing," he said firmly; "you are in strong hands at last. Utter a single threat and I will have you gaoled before the day is out."

The gipsy folded her arms and laughed shrilly.

"As you will," she told him; "but first hear me. If my niece is not under this wooden roof in five minutes I go to Chingford and put the police on the track of Tarbet the murderer."

Mr. Pontifex took her by the wrist.

"Scotland Yard is better," he suggested; "we will go to town together."

Naomi Lessing flung her shawl over her head.

"He has told you to defy me, has he?" she muttered. "Very wel—he cheated me out of Florence all those years—I gave him one chance, now I will pay the debt I owe him."

She motioned proudly to the exit.

"I accept," she said. "We will go to town together—you to Cavendish Square, I to Scotland Yard."

The solicitor bowed her out and followed her.

Not far off Lord Charles Everton was waiting, bewilderedly supporting his betrothed. With her dyed hair and stained complexion Lady Florence made a fascinating gipsy.

"Go forward and get us some sort of a closed conveyance," Mr. Pontifex whispered to her puzzled cavalier; "this person will accompany us."

Lord Charles stared, but the lawyer frowned instantly, and he hastened off, resigning Lady Florence to Mr. Pontifex's care.

The solicitor did not address either of his charges and they walked on in silence. At the western edge of the forest Lord Charles met them with a hired two-horse victoria.

The singular quartette got in, Mr. Pontifex giving the order, "London. Cavendish Square."

The driver scratched his cranium, but whipped up his team, notwithstanding.

It was a long drive from Chingford to Belgravia and the afternoon was nearly spent when they reached their journey's end. The lawyer—prompted by Lord Charles—indicated the town-house of the Tarbets and the victoria drew up.

"You must explain your determination in Lord Tarbet's presence," said Pontifex aloud, to the gipsy Naomi. She tossed her grey head contemptuously, but vouchsafed no other reply. Meanwhile Lord Charles had alighted, mounted the steps, and rung the bell. A footman was answering him. Mr. Pontifex's heart beat a trifle more quickly as he, too, left the carriage and ascended the stone flight.

"Tell Lord Tarbet that Mr. Pontifex and I are here, and see that there is no one in the library—we shall want it," Lord Charles Everton was saying.

The footman gazed at him with compassion.

"We—we've very bad news for you, my lord," he rejoined, hesitatingly; "his lordship had one of his attacks shortly after returning home. He—he did not rally as usual, my lord, and passed away—while unconscious, my lord."

"Good Heavens," cried Lord Charles, "Mr. Pontifex, this is horrible. Flo and I both absent—how can I tell her!"

"Bring Lady Florence in before breaking the news," recommended the solicitor; "as for the other person, I will attend to her."

He waited till Naomi Lessing was alone in the victoria, and then approached the window of the conveyance.

"Woman!" he said, "your last card is trumped—Lord Tarbet is dead!"

Naomi Lessing, startled, looked at the stern countenance of the lawyer. It terrified her with its expression of cold, intelligent power.

"He is, therefore, beyond your vengeance or that of the Law," added Mr. Pontifex deliberately; "but, if you desire to, you can attempt, by a futile scandal, to blast the happiness of your sister's child, as you did the features of her husband. You are at liberty to do your worst."

The solicitor went to the box of the victoria, and gave the man a sovereign. "Drive to Scotland Yard," he ordered. Then, without glancing round, he stalked up the steps of Tarbet House, and disappeared into the hall.

* * * * *

Naomi Lessing's cab never reached the great police depot, or, if it did, the authorities learning Lord Tarbet's death, refrained from publishing her accusation, and Lady Florence mourned for her father in ignorance of his crime. There had been a veil upon his life as there had been one upon his ruined visage. He carried both to his grave, for, according to the terms of his will, they buried him in the pink silk mask.

"The Fate of Michael Stanbridge."

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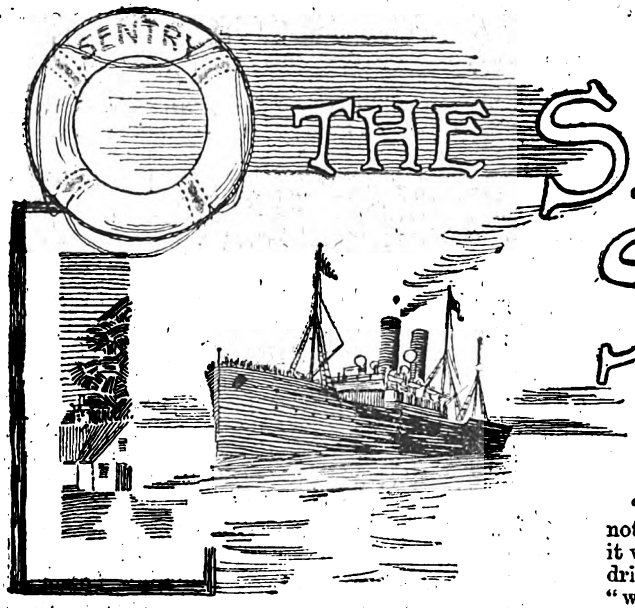

THE SANZIER SCANDAL

THE signal that the English mail is in sight has been flying since daybreak from the flagstaff by the little station on the cliff.

Long before the lazy town of Hootsville is well awake from its crapulous slumbers, the red hull, white funnels, and tall tapering masts of the long expected steamer might have been seen from the shore, as she grew out of the horizon and came up, panting and throbbing, through the rays of the rising sun.

Within a hundred yards of the harbour, her engines ease off, and she lies rolling on the heavy ground-swell of the Bay of Susquannah. And now a puff of smoke from her little gun, followed by a little report, which goes echoing and re-echoing through the gullies of the heights above the town, till it is caught up and silenced in the dreary moaning of the fog-horn, announces to the capital of the rising colony of Susquannah the arrival of the royal mail steamship *Sentry*.

Soon a string of dusky cabmen, shouting at and flogging their wretched cattle, come racing down the long road to the docks. Coolies and loafers—whose name is legion—drag themselves, blinking and yawning, from the friendly shade of the warehouses, and swell the motley mob making for the pier-head.

Mr. Port-Officer Leaming, in all the pomp and circumstance of a gig and coloured crew, puts off to board the new-comer and satisfy himself as to her state of health during the voyage.

And when this delicate matter has been settled, the screw of the *Sentry* revolves once more, and, amid the feeble cheering of the emigrants on the forecastle, she sweeps slowly into the dock.

Standing apart from the other passengers was a young lady dressed in deep mourning, whose graceful figure and very beautiful face were apparently familiar to many of the shore-people, who now came swarming on board as soon as the ship was moored at the side of the quay. But the majority of those who recognised her, either passed on with a rude, surprised stare, or stopped and saluted her with a mixture of freedom and pity, which was more offensive than the cut direct; and, indeed, so keenly did the poor girl—who, but a few months before, had been the proudest and brightest in Hootsville—feel her present position that at last she pulled down her veil as her tears began to fall.

"I know it is stupid to be hurt at all this; but, but I am not so strong as I thought. However, it will be all right; it will all be right when I have seen Walter."—and she dried her eyes as she whispered these hopes to herself—"when I have seen him, and heard the truth," and then she burst out crying again.

But her weakness, if it was such, was quickly detected; for a hand was laid heavily on her shoulder, and a harsh voice growled:

"Come, then; is it thus we commence anew, my child?"

She at once recovered herself, and calmly held up her cheek to be brushed by the bristly moustache of an old Frenchman, who stood leaning over her. She seemed accustomed to the tone and manner of this worthy gentleman, and was in no way surprised at her welcome, which, to say the least of it, was not demonstrative after a year's separation. But then he was her uncle, and many uncles are not demonstrative at any time. His name was Armand Sanzier, and his friends hinted that he had left his native country for the benefit of his fatherland. His antecedents were dubious; his addiction to drink, unlike the rest of his fellow-countrymen, was indubitable; and his temper and habits were so peculiar that even the gay people of Hootsville—and they were really not squeamish—showed no anxiety to cultivate his acquaintance.

"So then," he asked, peering round suspiciously, and growling at a newsboy who stood bawling in front of them, "you understood my letter? You are wise to come so readily to your old uncle and guardian now, my Delphine."

"I understood nothing," answered Delphine, "but that it was absolutely necessary for law business, and so on, about the estate, for me to return as soon as I had recovered; but I did not understand your—your insinuations about Walter."

"But yes," returned the old man, avoiding the searching look in the girl's great grey eyes, "he quite altered after your father's death. But," he added, turning fiercely on his niece, "you have dared to disobey me in writing to the scoundrel—say then?"

"Let go my arm, please," replied Miss Delphine Sanzier, "and do not call Mr. Naughton names in my presence. He has written and explained the reasons which prevented him from meeting me in England, as we had arranged; and I have written to him explaining everything—my coming back here, what you

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have said in your letter to me, and what you expect me to do. I hadn't time to write, except by this mail, and he will get that letter to-day. But I shall decline to believe one word you tell me about him until I hear the truth from his own lips. Had we not better leave the ship? These people seem to take an interest in us." And she moved away.

"One word, my child," muttered Armand, as he followed close at her side.

"Did he tell you that by the death of some brutal English relative, he is now rich—that he resigns his appointment, that he starts to-morrow by this very steamer for the upper coast *en route* for Aden? Ha!" And he passed his arm round his niece, who leant pale and fainting, against his shoulder as he whispered this cruel news into her ear. But she quickly regained sufficient composure to walk firmly towards the gangway, after pointing out her pile of luggage to her uncle.

The latter, satisfied with the effect of his information, followed her off the ship, saying triumphantly to himself:

"Now, if I can only keep her out of that fellow's way till to-morrow, all will go well."

* * * * *

The members of the Colonial Office in Hootsville were preparing to separate, after discharging their more or less arduous duties in a more or less zealous and able manner.

The chief clerk and his favourite satellites were assembled for "just one peg" before braving the red dust and sunshine in the streets.

They were all very nice young men in their way, and were beautifully arrayed in the height of Colonial fashion. Some of them had sauntered through a mute career at an English university or had appeared at competitive examinations with a certain sameness of result. Some said they came to Susquannah for their health, though their stock of that commodity was enviable; others said they came out "on spec"—and these, perhaps, spoke the truth.

There they were, however; and they tried to make the best of the "refuge for the destitute," as the Civil Service of Susquannah was facetiously termed.

The chief clerk, Mr. Shadrach Slinger, was preparing to tell a well-known chestnut when a tap was heard at the door.

"A dun! a dun!" sighed a diplomatist, slipping behind a screen from sheer force of habit, whilst the others promptly fumbled a few papers or looked into ledgers.

The chief clerk, putting on his official scowl, bawled out:

"Come in!"

Escorted by the office messenger, a smartly-dressed, handsome young woman, all smiles, entered unabashed, and begged the favour of an interview with the chief clerk.

The jaded officials at once took the hint, and their hats as well, levelling Parthian glances at the pretty Creole as they strolled away.

"I say, Croizette, this won't do, you know!" ejaculated Slinger.

"Monsieur must please excuse me: but has he seen the passenger list of the *Sentry*, which arrived this morning?"

"Passenger-list? No. What if I had?" he asked pettishly.

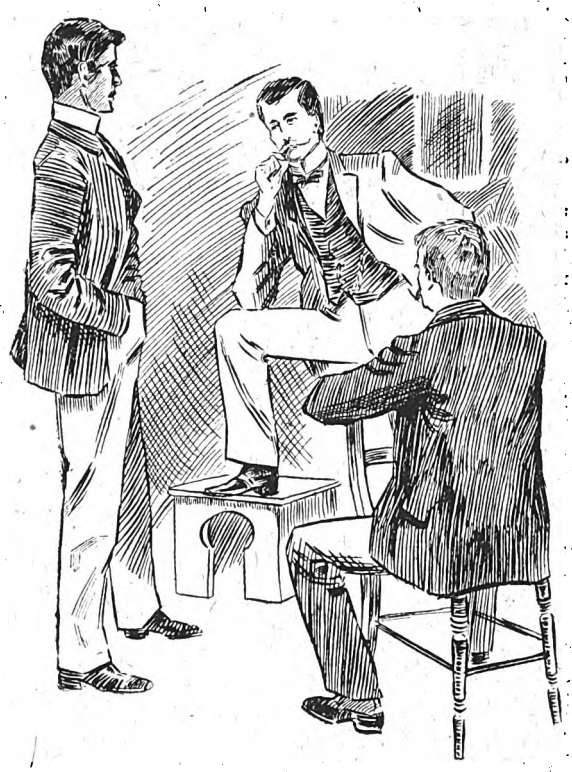
"In that case," said the Creole, quietly seating herself in the coolest corner of the room, "monsieur would have seen the name of my young mistress, Mademoiselle Sanzier."

"Good gracious!" cried Mr. Slinger, looking aghast.

"Exactly, monsieur the chief clerk. But I have a note for Mr. Naughton, which must be placed in his hands to-night, at all cost. Can you then, my dear gentleman, direct one to him?"

"It depends; but look here, I am not going to lend a helping hand to any mischief, you know."

"There will be mischief," said the girl significantly, "if this Mr. Naughton forsakes my mistress."



The chief clerk was preparing to tell a well-known chestnut.

"I know nothing about that," said the chief clerk, who took a common-sense view of the matter.

"I am in despair," cried the girl. "I must return before sunset to Lagaras—it is a long up-hill drive—or that old fox will suspect me. He has been watching my mistress the whole day as a cat does a mouse."

"Who?" growled Mr. Slinger; "that scoundrel of a Sanzier?"

"But yes. Pardon, monsieur," continued the girl, "can you suggest how I am to get this note to Mr. Naughton?"

"I can't, indeed," was the answer; and the chief clerk stood on the hearthrug impatiently tugging at his moustache.

Suddenly a tall figure appeared at one of the windows, which opened down to the ground of the office courtyard.

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"Ha! there you are! On the crank still?" cried the new-comer, stepping in over the sill, and closing the French shutters after him. "Pouf! how blazing hot it is! Well, I've done my p.p.c. visits, thank goodness; paid my 'ticks,' packed my traps, and am off by the morning mail." And, ignorant of the presence of the lady's maid in the darkened room, he proceeded to light a cigar.

Slinger touched him on the elbow, and, looking up, he saw the girl standing in front of him, holding out the note.

"Croizette!" he mutters, dropping the lighted match. "What's this?"

"A note for Mr. Naughton. I have the honour to await an answer." And she smiled at the chief clerk, who scowled in return.

Naughton seized the slip of paper, tore it open, and read:

For Heaven's sake, see me before you go.

He stood for a few moments lost in thought, and then telling Croizette to follow him to his lodgings, he bade his friend good-bye, and hurried from the room.

* * * * * *

Lagaras, the property of Delphine Sanzier, and the home of her uncle and guardian, lies at some height above Hootsville on the high-road over the mountain range to St. Lucie, the trading-station on the northern side of the island of Susquannah. Nestling under the shelter of the hills which rise behind, and fronting the straggling town and broad bay which lie below, the great comfortable buildings, vast courtyards and outhouses, with carefully tended grounds teeming with vegetation, and rich plantations stretching far away to the coastline, are attractive enough to make many a man's mouth water; and this effect, it may be added they certainly produced upon the present manager of the estate, good Armand Sanzier.

Inside the house, dinner, which most certainly was not of herbs and contentment therewith, had dragged its weary length through a profusion of dishes and messes; and the "master"—for so Armand preferred to be styled—began to brace himself for the coming breeze by making a furious onslaught on the contents of the decanters, roundly abusing the frightened negroes who waited at table.

He sat for a short time gulping down his wine and watching closely his niece, who had moved to a chair near the open window.

"It appears that my beautiful niece is not pleased with what her old uncle has done for her benefit," remarked Armand huskily, for he had dined not wisely, but too well.

"If you consider that by trying to separate Walter and myself you have acted for my benefit," replied Delphine, in contemptuous tones, "you are utterly mistaken."

"Indeed!" sneered Armand. "Was it not better that you should return to your proper home instead of staying in Paris, without protection?"

"I am the best judge of that. But do you suppose I should have obeyed you in coming out here again, after the disgrace I have brought on my name——"

"Tut, tut—what does it matter?" sneered her uncle.

"If," continued Delphine, disregarding his interruption, "I had not expected to meet Mr. Naughton here and be married to him?"

"Pardon, my child, but this dear Naughton does not now appear anxious to be married to you."

"We shall see!" she said, with a quiet smile.

"My faith, yes, to-morrow!" he laughed.

"Let me tell you, my uncle Armand, that you are acting not only wickedly but madly. Walter, you know well, would have followed me, after I ran away to avoid exposure, had you not sued him for that money which my father had advanced him——"

"Business is business," interposed Armand, holding up his wine to the light. "But continue. This is amusing."

"And now you have the audacity," she cried excitedly, "to use your authority as my guardian to prevent our ever seeing one another again. Ah, but it is droll! This guardianship makes us laugh!"

"He laughs best who laughs last," chuckled Sanzier.

"But you know, my uncle," she said eagerly, leaning towards him, "we do not remain children always. There comes a time when one requires a guardian no longer—you understand? And if you are rash enough to reject Walter's proposals to-night, we shall——"

"Softly, softly, my little one!" growled Armand, rising with difficulty and confronting the angry girl. "I anticipate no proposals from any of your Walters this fine night. The young Lothario to whom you have referred so frequently, leaves Hootsville at daybreak *en route* for St. Lucie and Aden. This I have already mentioned, if I mistake not." And he resumed his seat with drunken gravity.

"That is true," remarked Delphine absently, for she was listening to the sound of horses' hoofs and carriage wheels, which were now audible through the open windows. "But he arrives to pay you a parting visit, my uncle," and she sprang joyfully towards the verandah.

"But no," shouted Armand furiously, "I'll have no more foolery in that quarter," and, disregarding her struggles and intreaties, he caught her up in his powerful grasp, and carried her off to her chamber at the other end of the house.

"Rest there, my little beauty," he gasped, as he thrust her roughly into the room and turned the key upon her. "Stop till I have sent your young lover about his business," and he staggered back along the passages to receive his visitor.

Armand had scarcely returned to the dining-room before Walter Naughton, heedless of the remonstrances of the half-hearted negroes, presented himself. "I must have a few words with you, Mr. Sanzier," he said, standing defiantly in the doorway, "whether you wish it or not."

"So be it," replied Armand. "One would not wish to turn *even a dog* out on a night like this. Ah, the lightning!" he growled, half starting back as a bright flash gleamed through the room and the heavy rain plashed on the verandah. "Now, my good young sir," he continued, pointing to a chair and seating himself, "may I offer you anything? No? Excuse me if I give myself one little glass"—for Armand's nerves were slightly shaken by his late athletic display at Delphine's expense, and by the presence of the unwelcome Naughton. "And now for your few words, if you please."

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"You must pardon my intrusion at this hour, but I had no other opportunity before leaving the Colony, for if I miss to-morrow's steamer I shall have to wait here another six weeks. Mr. Sanzier, what is the meaning of Delphine's sudden and unexpected return?"

"By whom unexpected?" asked Armand, smoking calmly.

"By myself, of course," returned Naughton, beginning to chafe under the Frenchman's sarcastic tone.

"And by what right, may I have the honour of inquiring, does Mr. Naughton question the movements of my niece?"

"You know well enough," said Naughton sternly,

"It appears that my beautiful niece is not pleased with what her old uncle has done for her benefit," remarked Armand, huskily.

"that, when Delphine foolishly ran away from home, I would gladly have made amends for all, and was preparing to follow her, with her father's pardon and approval—say rather, anxious wish—that we should be married as soon as possible. But before I could do anything, poor Mr. Sanzier died suddenly, and then you threw every obstacle in my way to marrying your ward, utterly crippling me at that time by buying up my debts and suing me right and left. Yes," continued Naughton, angry at the recollection of his troubles, "I know you always owed me a grudge for that black-balling business. But we're quits now, by Jove! And when you found you could harass me no further in money matters you coolly forbade me ever to mention again your niece's name!"

"And you as coolly continue to do so," remarked Armand, smothering a yawn and returning to the bottle.

"I will not detain you much longer. I merely wish you to know the extent of my 'dishonourable conduct,' as you once called it, by telling you that I have resigned my appointment, as I now have ample means, and that I intended meeting Delphine in England, where your consent to our marriage can be dispensed with——"

"After?" interrupted Delphine's guardian, who, by the way, was getting rather thick in his speech.

"But you seem to have got wind of my intentions," Naughton went on, taking no heed of the other's interruption; "for you write and get poor Delphine to come out again, under some cock-and-bull story, for the purpose of getting her under your control, and hoping that I shall have left the place without meeting her."

"And I see but little chance of a meeting, eh?" hiccoughed the host; "especially if monsieur desires to sail at daybreak from the beautiful—the charming city of Hootsville. Ha! ha!"

"Yes, yes. No doubt you have calculated it all very nicely," said Naughton soothingly, whereat the elderly gentleman began to lose his temper; "but we shall see. 'Twas a pity you forgot to reckon upon my feelings for Delphine. However, tell me once and for all, do you still refuse your consent to our marriage?"

"If I gave my consent, what arrangements would you make?"

"Arrangements? I don't quite follow you. We should certainly sell this place, if that's what you mean."

And Naughton took a turn up and down the room, with the growing conviction that the old gentleman did not very well know what he was talking about.

"Ha!" muttered Armand, putting the lighted end of his cigar into his mouth, which proved unpalatable. "And you wouldn't prefer keeping on Lagaras, and my managing it for you?"

"Oh, no," said Naughton dryly. "Neither Delphine nor I have any love for the place, after what has happened here."

"Tut, tut, that is mere sentiment," observed Armand, taking a drink of brandy. "And you would then, I suppose, in the event of my allowing you to marry my niece—who is, you must recollect, under my control until she is of age, which will not be for another two years——"

"Yes, yes," interposed Naughton wearily; "but if you allow her to marry me here in Hootsville?"

"Will you," inquired Armand, raising his eyes to Naughton, "will you investigate matters relative to—to—the investment of the sums left by my late brother?"

"It will be my duty to inquire into everything concerning my wife's property," said Naughton, looking Armand straight in the face.

"Then you shall never marry her," screamed the old man, jumping up and kicking over the chair in his passion. "Leave the house at once," he roared, shaking his fists in childish rage, "or, by——" and after fumbling aimlessly for a second or two in his coat pocket, he dashed raving from the room.

"Better not stay to be shot; he's drunk," Naughton said to himself, and, striding across the floor, he threw open the shutters, vaulted over the verandah, and dropped his long form on to the lawn below. His carriage, a light-covered buggy, with a pair of wiry, native-bred horses, were standing under a portico in charge of his servant, a white man, who, upon receiving certain whispered instructions from his master, handed the reins to Naughton, touched his hat, and sauntered away to the back premises.

And then, as they drove down the avenue, a flash of

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lightning indiscreetly disclosed the fact, that, under the hood of the carriage, was Miss Sanzier, and that Mr. Naughton was kissing her.

A few minutes afterwards, Armand Sanzier, revolver in hand, lurched furiously into the dining-room and found it empty. He then floundered on to the verandah. Cursing freely, he came in again, and had recourse once more to the spirit-case.

He then began to laugh, not heartily—he never did, under any circumstances—and suddenly snatching up a lamp, staggered across the floor.

With a very suspicious air of having been listening and watching, Miss Sanzier's maid, Croizette, confronted him in the doorway.

"What do you want here?" he growled.

"I come to warn Monsieur not to wait for Mademoiselle, who is a little ill, and who has gone to bed," she said glibly, as if repeating a well-learnt lesson.

"Ill or not, in bed or out of it," he mumbled, "I must tell her—ho, ho!—I must tell her at once how I have frightened away this gay lover of hers—ho, ho, ho!" And he had to steady himself against the wall until he had finished laughing over the rout and retreat of the panic-stricken Naughton. "But you," he said to the abigail, who, arms akimbo, had been joining merrily in his mirth, "can go to bed. Where are the others?"

"The domestics have but shortly gone to the ball of quality at Hootsville. Mademoiselle gave them leave this afternoon," she added, with a sly look. "Ah, how I love the dance! but I dare not abandon my dear mistress. Good-night then, Monsieur Armand."

"Be off!" was the gracious reply, as the good man of Lagaras started on his visit of comfort to his niece.

It was rather difficult steering for one in his state, so the rats seemed to think, as he nearly trod on their tails in the gloomy corridors; but he reached at last, without any accident, Miss Sanzier's part of the house. He knocked, at first softly, then viciously, calling to his niece to open. He tried the handle, but the door was locked and the key was gone. Thereupon he pummelled vigorously, and was even rude enough to kick at the lower panels, and, very soon losing the little patience he possessed, he put his huge shoulder to the daintily-painted door and sent it flying, lock and all.

Boiling with rage, he burst into the sitting-room, and dashing aside a chair, which stupidly stood in his way, he stumbled on into the bedchamber beyond.

Putting down the light, he peered about, calling:

"Delphine! Delphine!"

But no Delphine replied. He staggered to the bed, and pulled aside the hangings. The bed was empty. And on the table near the lamp lay a tiny note addressed to him. He took it up and read:

I shall return with my husband. Good-bye. Thy niece—
DELPHINE.

He sat down brooding over the ruin of his schemes till he gradually grew sober, and a plan of action occurred to him.

Half-past eleven! And Naughton's steamer sailed at daybreak. Yes, there was still a chance of catching them. They couldn't be far ahead. Ha, ha! he might turn the tables on them yet! And, restored to something like his old self by the prospect of revenge and success, he rushed from the room, ran along the passages, crossed the courtyard, and strode into the stables. Cursing the absence of the "hands"—who were away dancing at Hootsville—he hastily saddled a horse, and clattered off in pursuit of his niece.

The road between Lagaras and Hootsville—scarcely broad enough to allow two carriages to pass with ease—descended through the valley of the Blanchec Range, now passing a deep ravine on the one side and high banks and masses of rockwork on the other, and now winding through the thick plantations above the town. But Sanzier knew every inch of the familiar road, and, thinking only of his meeting with Naughton, pushed at a reckless pace down the canon.

In turning a shoulder of the highway—the St. Lucie route it was called—he suddenly sighted ahead of him a covered cart or buggy, whose bright lamps made lanes of light in the surrounding darkness.

"I have them! Hooray, I have them!" he roared in triumph, slashing his already terrified horse over the head in the heat of the moment.

In a few seconds he was at the side of the carriage, calling fiercely to the driver to stop. The reply was a fearful blow across the face from the butt-end of a whip, and Sanzier reeled in his saddle.

The blow would have been repeated had not a girl in the back of the cart flung herself on the driver's upraised arm, and arrested the stroke, while Sanzier, sick and stunned, sank forward on his horse's neck, and thus failed to see that his assailant was Naughton's servant, and that the woman was Croizette.

But now the driver again urged on his team, and rapidly descended the hill towards Hootsville, leaving Sanzier behind, swaying to and fro in his stirrups.

The effects of the blow, however, very quickly wore off, leaving Sanzier in a more infuriated state than ever, and he charged down the steep and narrow road after the buggy, bent on vengeance, and reckless of the consequences.

He soon caught them up, and pursued and pursuers side by side tore down the incline, on their left a deep ravine, on their right a wall of cliff.

"Stop or I'll fire!" he yelled, drawing his pistol, as he galloped on the near side of the cart, perilously near the precipice.

But his threat was wasted, for the horses had now got beyond their driver's control, and dragging the frail vehicle at breakneck speed, they plunged, bumped, and rattled over the wretched road, still further excited by Sanzier's shouts and Croisette's screams.

Sanzier levelled at the near wheeler, and fired. The horse fell, ploughing up the mud and stones, and capsizing the cart.

The hood struck Sanzier's shoulder before he could rein up, and his horse swerved against the paling at the edge of the ravine. It smashed like tinder, while the ground broke away beneath the struggling hoofs of the frightened animal.

Sapped by the late rains, a huge piece of the roadside slipped, and, before Sanzier could disengage himself, horse and man were hurled out of sight.

Meanwhile, Naughton and Delphine were driving quietly in the opposite direction, along the high road from Lagaras to St. Lucie, intending to wait at that port for the steamer with their servants and luggage. But, upon hearing the fate of Sanzier, they returned at once to Hootsville, attended by the bruised but faithful Croisette, and her companion, Naughton's servant, with his arm in a sling.

The body of Armand Sanzier, was afterwards recovered and now rests in the cemetery of the Catholic Church at Hootsville.

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THE LION'S WARS

The Abyssinian War.

1867.

IN 1860 a Mr. Plowden, who had been appointed British Consul in Abyssinia some nineteen years before, was, whilst journeying to Massowah, attacked by a band of rebels and killed.

The King of Abyssinia, in a dispatch to Queen Victoria shortly after, expressed his regret at what had happened; but the contrition of a potentate who held the opinion that he had been specially created and raised from a lowly position to be the ruler of the country, was not likely to be very sincere, so when Captain Cameron, the new Consul, following the policy of his predecessor, promised that Britain's protection should still be continued to the people living on the frontier district of Bogos, the dusky monarch publicly proclaimed his displeasure.

The king's rage was presently increased by a visit which Captain Cameron paid to Egypt, a country the king professed to despise.

Although Earl Russell signified his disapproval of the Consul's visit, he did not think it politic to tell the monarch so, which so annoyed his majesty, that he addressed a strong remonstrance to the Queen. When he found that his letter was not likely to be answered he determined to be revenged.

So he laid hands on all the Europeans he could find, including Captain Cameron himself, had them beaten, heaped on them the greatest indignities, and then, loading them with chains, cast them into the dungeons beneath his palace.

Repeated attempts to procure their release having failed, it dawned on the authorities that it would be as well to send an answer to the letter the irate monarch had sent to the Queen.

This was accordingly done, but the apology or whatever it was intended to be was so clumsily worded that when it reached Cairo it was sent back to England for revision.

The officials found the composition of the next letter so absorbing that they quite forgot to affix the royal seal.

Still, the oversight was not discovered till March 1865.

The wrath of the tyrant was now fairly bubbling over. The country was by this time becoming interested in the matter, but discussion was burked by the ministry declaring that anything said in the House of Commons would reach the Emperor's ears, and prevent a pacific termination.

The Conservative government, which shortly after came in, tried to secure the release of the captives by offering a handsome ransom, but as this was haughtily declined on the grounds that the King of Abyssinia was

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the richest potentate in the world, hostilities became inevitable.

At the moment when it was decided to send out an expedition, Abyssinia was to us practically an unknown country. We knew that its ruler had in his youth followed the humblest of callings, that on becoming sovereign he had called himself Theodore, King of Ethiopia, there being an ancient prophecy that a king of this name should become master of the world, a prediction moreover supported by the inscription on the seal affixed to State documents: King of Kings.

It was also said that his palace at Magdala was situated on the top of a rock 10,000 feet high, that it was absolutely impregnable, and further that the people, in addition to being the oldest christian community in the world, were extremely brave and warlike. Still, to all intents and purposes, the country was a sealed book.

Travellers, it is true, had visited the land, but their accounts of it differed. Some described it as fertile in the extreme, full of broad plains watered by numerous rivers; others declared that it was so intersected by mountains that thorough exploration was impossible. Those who described the land as fertile recommended that the Army should be sent without an extensive commissariat, whilst those who held the opposite view maintained that not only was the country unsuited for military operations, but as it barely supported its own population an invading army, which did not bring its own supplies, would starve.

The folly of sending an army into a country about which so little was known, filled Europe with amazement. To-day it pleases our critics abroad to describe us as selfish, grasping, cunning and unscrupulous. We must have sadly changed, and rapidly, too, since 1867, for in that year one of the Berlin papers, speaking of us, said: "The English were always a quixotic race delighting in foolhardy enterprize. The cheerfulness, nay, the eagerness they are displaying to enter on a war which may not only end in defeat, but is certain to cost a vast sum of money, shows that for all their business aptitude they are the most stupidly romantic people in the world."

Foreign newspapers were filled daily with letters on the folly of the expedition. Some drew ghastly pictures of the malaria on the coast, and the unhealthiness of the interior. Others declared that the men would die of thirst, whilst some learned savant of world-wide reputation dwelt unctuously on herds of enormous and remarkably active hippopotami with a liking for human flesh. In fact every animal and reptile antagonistic to the life of man was, according to the European press, to be found in Abyssinia. The horrors they depicted varied, of course, but all agreed that the expedition would never return.

France plainly intimated that our shrewdness was leavened with a large mixture of insanity. But the public took no heed of this gibing. Its pride was touched. Some Englishmen had been murdered and others were in prison, and they were not going to stand that sort of thing with impunity.

It might be a pity, perhaps, to destroy the romance clinging to a nation which boasted a succession of monarchs claiming direct descent from Menelik, son of Solomon by the Queen of Sheba, but the prestige of the country was imperilled and we had a duty to perform.

If Englishmen could be ill-treated and murdered in Abyssinia, they could be murdered elsewhere. The bond which held our vast Empire together was prestige. That gone, we might as well retire from business, and this we did not intend to do. So it was no use telling us that Abyssinia was an unknown land. Our generals would have to be a shade more careful, that was all, and not be above taking advice. They were quite clear on that point.

Military science is all very well, but in a country about which nothing was known the advice of one person was quite as good as that of another. We are not without our fireside strategists to-day, and ther is a disposition to sneer at their conclusions, although, if there is any truth in the saying that "the lookers-on see most of the game," they are not so very far out after all.

But however well-equipped our amateur critics may be to-day, they are not nearly so numerous as they were in 1867. It is said that, before the expedition started, over 30,000 letters were sent to the War Office as to how the operations should be conducted. Perhaps the strangest fact of all was that supporters of King Theodore were non-existent.

The general selected to head the Army was Sir Robert Napier, an Indian officer of Engineers. After much controversy, in which the public had a good deal to say, it was resolved to get it ready in Bombay. The strength of the force was hotly debated, but at length it was decided that to bring the despot to his senses 10,000 troops would be sufficient.

The first detachment arrived in Annesley Bay on the coast of Abyssinia in October in 1867. Needless to say, the prospects of success were not very great. The mismanagement which had characterised so many of our past wars was not absent in the Abyssinian expedition. Fortunately, a certain Mr. Thomas Atkins was interested in the forthcoming affair. He had pulled the country through on other occasions, and it was believed he would now.

It will scarcely be credited that the Government, after giving the command to Sir Robert Napier, a military man, proceeded to tie his hands by confiding all the work of preparation to a civilian, Sir Seymour Fitzgerald, Governor of Bombay: with the result that Sir Robert Napier had to consult the Governor, who knowing nothing of military matters, had in turn to consult his secretary, a gentleman whose knowledge (although he had been in the Army years before) was not much greater than his own.

To show how this truly wonderful arrangement worked, we will give one instance: Sir Robert submitted a plan for a transport train, rather an important matter in a country which boasted few roads and no railways; one would have thought that coming from an engineer officer and a most capable one into the bargain, it would have been at once accepted. Quite the reverse. The Governor had to be mindful of his dignity and the traditions of red tape.

Besides, he distrusted Sir Robert; he had somehow got to think that Sir Robert was a relic of the bow and arrow period, and was in all respects a most inefficient officer.

So he sniffed at the scheme and passed it on to his secretary, who, having forgotten all he knew about transport working, if indeed he ever knew anything at all, consulted a friend who did.

This, of course, led to a delay so prolonged that Sir Robert Napier actually landed in Abyssinia without any plan for feeding his army.

Of course the truth leaked out, and when it transpired

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Drawn by] **Theodore shot himself just as two of our men entered the room.** *[Lawson Wood.*

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that the friend of Sir S. Fitzgerald's secretary had never been in Abyssinia or drawn up a plan before, the Press waxed wrath.

But the public did not lose its self-possession. The disasters of the Crimea lingered ruefully in their memories.

They thought we were in for a bad time, but with marvellous calm—sure sign of a nation's greatness—they set their teeth and looked to Tommy to pull them through as he had done before.

They were too generous, as they are now, to single out individuals for attack when it was the system which was at fault. The representatives they sent to the House of Commons always absented themselves from debates on military subjects, so the fault was really their own. But they let it be known that as Sir Robert Napier was to lead the expedition he ought to have full power, and as the War Office after much co-agitation also adopted this view, things began to look more hopeful.

The expedition, which numbered 11,770 men of whom a large proportion were Indian troops, then made their way slowly across the mountain passes to the great table land beyond, some 9,000 feet above sea level, reaching the summit without mishap.

This was fortunate, for Abyssinia in those days being almost an impassable country, a slight resistance might have greatly delayed the progress of the expedition. But Theodore, although of supernatural origin, was extremely cruel, and consequently anything but popular with his subjects.

Tyrants they did not mind, because of liberty, as we know it, they had no conception, but they had a weakness for living as long as possible, so after their ruler had excelled all his previous efforts by burning and killing 3,000 of them in one month they forgot all about his not having been born in the usual conventional manner and rose in rebellion.

When the peasantry and mountaineers were joined by most of the army the authority of Mr. Theodore (as one of his captives persisted in calling him) was limited to his camp and capital. Finding the former unsafe he removed it to the vicinity of his capital, and whiled away the time which intervened before the British troops arrived, by daily interviews with his prisoners thinking, after the customary manner of tyrants, to derive amusement from their fears by treating them well one day and threatening them with death the next.

But the five captives being Britons were so little moved that when the King on one occasion pointed out a big gun, which he called Sevastopol, he was advised to change the name as the soldiers, if they heard it, would insist on carrying the gun back to England.

The troops on their march across the rocky highlands of Abyssinia met with no resistance from the inhabitants who, on the contrary, appeared extremely pleased to see them so long as they paid for their provisions which of course they did. Still they suffered on the march the greatest hardships which a British soldier can be called on to endure.

He will do as much fighting as you please, but he likes his meals regular, so as the commissariat was not able to keep pace, especially when the soldiers were crossing mountain ranges many peaks of which were 10,000 feet high, dinner soon came to be regarded as a luxury, and supper as a legendary meal.

Still the men never murmured. They had been sent to release their fellow countrymen, kept in chains by a "blackamoor king," as they put it, and they meant o get them out.

It took a great deal of explaining to render the object of the expedition clear to the Indian soldiers, but before Magdala was reached they were quite as enthusiastic as their companions.

After a toilsome march the army in April entered a deep ravine through which the river Bashilo flows, and emerging found themselves on the direct road to Magdala.

On Good Friday Colonel Phayre went ahead to reconnoitre. The approach to the Capital seemed inviting enough, but a few miles further on the character of the scenery entirely changed.

A huge tangible inextricable mass of mountains rose up on every side, so admirably adapted for an ambuscade that it became necessary to devise a fresh plan of approach.

Before any possible enemy could have interposed the little army was divided into two bodies which, by avoiding the beaten tracks, contrived to approach the three hills Islamgee joined to Fahla hill on which Theodore's palace stood, the site of the king's camp and Magdala.

These hills, situated about a mile and a half from each other, formed a sort of three cornered amha so mutually protecting each other that attack seemed almost hopeless.

Colonel Phayre was an extremely wily officer who, having no faith in frontal attacks, sent a body of troops and a mountain battery under the command of Colonel Milward round the right up the Arogee Pass. At the top of this our men found King Theodore who immediately opened fire.

Sir Robert Napier who had reached an eminence on the left at once sent the Punjab Pioneers to their support, and the fight soon became tropically warm.

Colonel Milward's men were so exposed, and the king's position was so excellent, that the little force began to waver, but the Naval Rocket Brigade, under Commander Fellowes, and the Mountain Battery, under Colonel Penn, got into play, doing great execution.

Then the 4th Regiment (the King's Own) appeared on the scene, and their snider rifles made terrible havoc in the enemies' ranks. The Abyssinians, it must be confessed, proved themselves worthy foemen that day. How they kept their ground at all when from all sides sniders, mountain guns, and rockets were pouring in the most deadly volleys was marvellous. The pluck with which they time after time sought to regain their positions from which they had been dislodged won the admiration of our troops.

They had been terribly disconcerted by our plan of attack, having been led to believe that we should storm the hill in one compact body. Hemmed in as they were, they clung till dislodged from their last stronghold, leaving, when they retreated, over 500 dead on the ground and 1,500 wounded, Theodore's favourite general being amongst the slain. Beaten as they were they hung on our flank and gave a loud cheer when Sir Charles Stavely, tired of butchery, sounded the bugle for a retreat to camp.

The Abyssinians, for all their bravery, must have been poor marksmen in those days for, incredible as it may seem in the light of modern warfare, we had not a single man killed, and only nineteen wounded.

The king was naturally dismayed at this crushing defeat, so sent Mr. Flad and Lieutenant Prideaux, two of his prisoners, into our camp next morning with a flag of truce to make terms.

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Sir Robert Napier insisted that all the captives should be sent into his camp and this accordingly was done. On the 13th of April two brigades of 5,000 men each moved forward to attack Magdala itself.

Of the strength of the capital it is impossible to give any adequate idea. The three hills already mentioned resembled a roughly-shaped T.

The suitability of their formation for military purposes was increased by their not only being several hundred feet above the level of the plain, but the sides were broken up into scarps and terraces so precipitously faced as to form perhaps the strongest natural fortress in the world.

It is equally impossible, from any written description, to realise the strength of Magdala itself. It is protected by lofty overhanging cliffs so steep and sheer, that not even the hardiest of the mountaineers had ever been known to scale them.

The only approach was by two narrow paths, north and south, which led up to a strong gateway. It was by the northern path as being on the side of Selassee that our troops were called on to effect an entrance.

Monster, murderer as Theodore was, commiseration cannot be withheld him in this the hour of his fall. Behind the gateway he stationed himself to meet the onslaught of the finest troops in the world. His followers were few for the bulk of his army had fled.

The troops as they advanced rained a storm of lead on the gateway which, being strongly protected by a stockade was affected very little. But the obstruction which had resisted the bullets was made short work of when our soldiers tested its quality with the butt end of their muskets. The moment it was levelled the troops rushed into the fortress and a desperate hand-to-hand struggle ensued.

The warriors who had remained faithful to the fallen fortunes of their monarch, believing firmly in his supernatural origin, thought that a delay of even a few minutes would give the angels time to carry him away. Impostors may dupe their followers but not themselves.

Theodore took advantage of the few moments respite allowed him, to climb to a higher apartment. The soldiers were close upon his heels but Theodore had killed too many of his own subjects not to know how to take his own life. He shot himself just as two of our men entered the room.

Amongst the dead at the gateway were several of Theodore's devoted chiefs, the most notorious being Ras Engedda, a worthy who was strongly in favour of murdering the European prisoners.

Sir Robert having conquered the country, or rather the capital, was terribly puzzled to know what to do with it. Had the Abyssinian war occurred in these days we should probably have annexed it. But Sir Robert, knowing nothing of Imperial expansion, presented it to a chief named Gobaze, but that worthy for some reason or other declined the offer. Anxious, however, to prevent the city falling into the clutches of the Gallas, a fierce Mohammedan tribe and the hereditary enemies of the christian Abyssinians, he resorted to the agency of fire. Accordingly it was burnt to the ground. The guns, too, were destroyed, in fact so completely was the work carried out that to use the words of Sir Robert Napier in a dispatch home "nothing remains but a blackened rock."

Napier on his return to this country was elevated to the peerage and on his death was accorded a public funeral.

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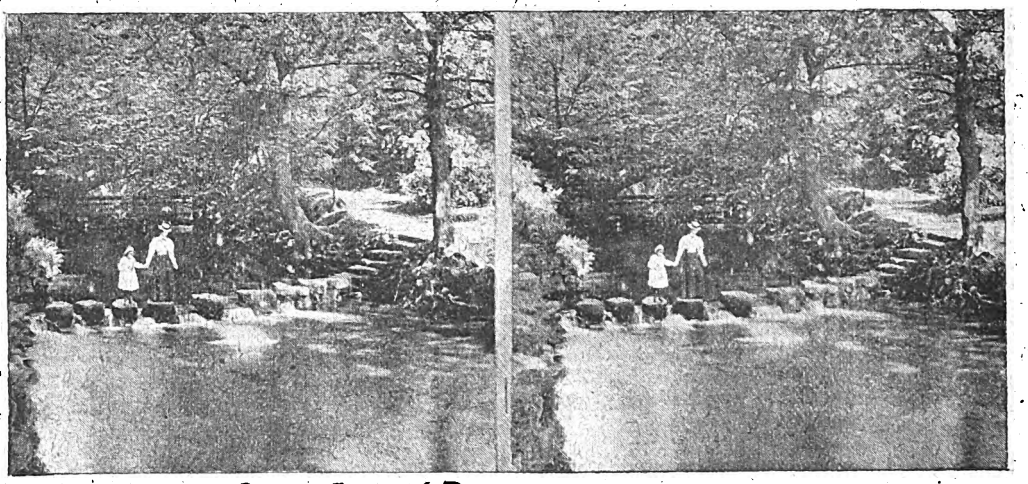

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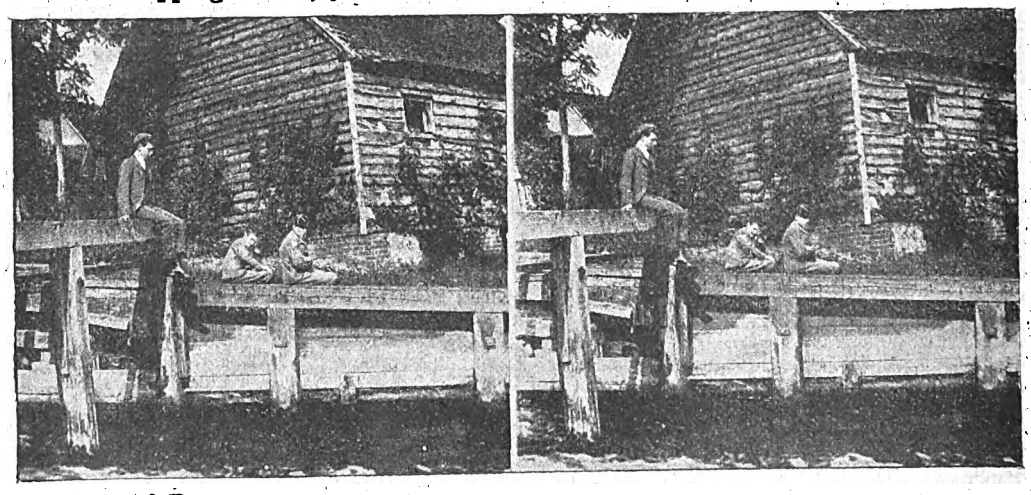

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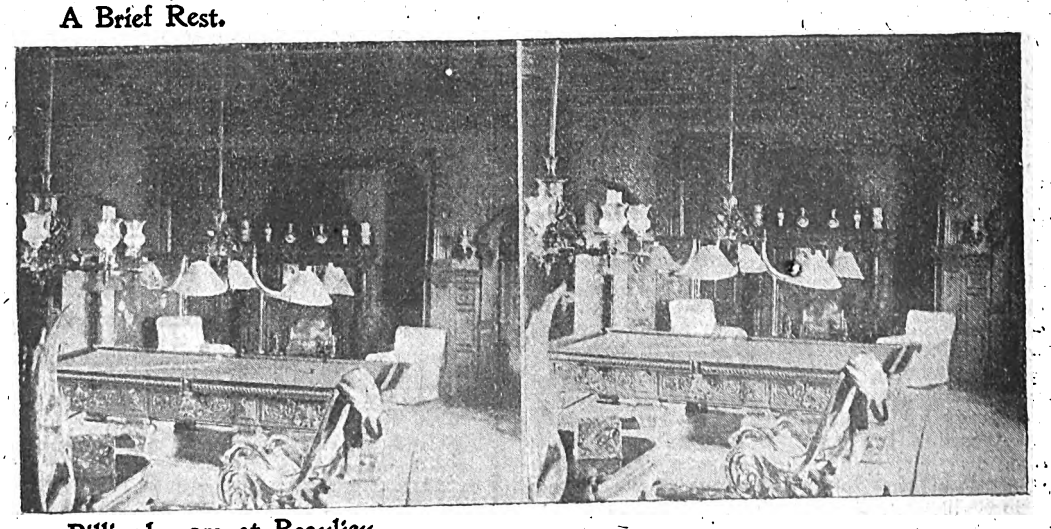

Billiard-room at Beaulieu.

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TALES TOLD "OFF DUTY."

[You probably don't know the "Stand-Easy" Club. It isn't in the directory, and you might live next door to the place for years without knowing of its existence by that name. It isn't a conventional club; there is no subscription, and there is no register of members. It is merely a room in a quiet, orderly, and select hostelry in Westminster, where, by common consent, a number of officials of all kinds meet when "off duty." There you may find detectives from Scotland Yard, near by; firemen, commissionaires, a soldier or two, and maybe a doctor from St. Thomas' Hospital or elsewhere. A motley crowd they would be if they wore their uniforms, but at the "Stand-Easy" uniforms are a rarity, "mufti" being the unwritten rule. The result is a gathering of quiet, well-behaved, and well-dressed men. Saturday night is the time when one sees the biggest muster, for then it is the custom for one member to regale the company with a story, the story being, as a rule, an account of some incident in the teller's own career.]

On a recent evening a guest was introduced to the club in the person of a Mr. Percy from Colorado, and as his presence there was likely to be of rare occurrence, he was promptly called upon for a story. He complied by telling the company how once upon a time he had been

NEARLY LYNCHED.

WHILE we were in camp at Lost Cañon, Colorado, we were greatly disturbed one morning by the discovery that "Rob," my brother John's favourite riding horse, was missing. My brother, I should perhaps explain, was superintendent of a railway survey party which had been in the West for several seasons. I had but recently joined the party.

The other animals of our little train were on hand as usual, but this fine horse which, every morning as regularly as the sun rose, came whinnying to the camp-fire for his accustomed treat of cold biscuit which John never failed to have laid by for him, was absent.

A careful search of the ground where the horses had been grazing led to the finding of several suspicious signs. First, there was the track of a shod horse, whereas all of ours were unshod; secondly, a half-masticated quid of tobacco, still moist, an article which none of us used in that form except "Old Joe," and he had not been in that part of the cañon for several days; and thirdly, some shreds of woollen yarn hanging on a grease-wood brush, such as might have been torn away from a saddle blanket.

We followed the trail of shod horses for a mile or two up on the *mesa*, in the direction of the ranches on the Mancos, but there we lost it.

Returning to the camp, John saddled one of the other horses and rode over to the Mancos to make inquiries of the ranchers there, but returned without having learnt anything either of the horse or of the thief.

We were all satisfied that the horse had been stolen, and all, especially John, were angry. To steal a horse in that country, where a man's comfort depends upon being well mounted, is considered a capital crime. Had the thief fallen into our hands, he would have met with but little mercy.

But the third morning after Rob's disappearance we heard his familiar whinny as he led up the band, as usual, for his morning ration. Though, as John used to say, he could do "everything but talk," we could never find out where he had been during his three days' absence, or how he had managed to get back.

About a week afterwards it became necessary for John to go to Animas City to replenish our stock of food; but on the evening before he was to start, in driving up the horses "Brimstone," a vicious bronco, aimed a kick at him, which, striking the knee, so disabled him that he could not sit in the saddle without great discomfort, and it was decided that I should make the trip in his place.

I was a stranger in that country, as I have said, but the trail was an easy one to follow and I started early in the morning, riding Rob, and leading one of the other horses upon which to pack back the supplies.

John had a fine, new *aparejo*, or pack-saddle, at Animas, which I was to get and use on the return journey, so I took none with me. I was to stop at Parrott City over night, ride down to Animas, make my purchases, return to Parrott, stay there the second night, and then return to camp.

I reached Parrott, and as I rode down the one street of the city, I noticed that I seemed to be an object of interest to every one I met—all men, for there was not a woman or child at that time in the place, except the old French landlady of the "Miner's Rest."

Every one whom I met would stop, look at me, then at the horse, and, turning, gaze after me as I kept on towards the hotel. They began to collect in groups, and to follow me as I rode along.

Why I should thus be the "cynosure of every eye" I could not at first imagine. I was neither so handsome nor so ugly as to attract especial attention, and surely the presence of a stranger was not so uncommon a thing in that part of the country as thus to excite a

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whole community. Finally I decided that it must be the horses, for both "Rob" and "Witch" were fine animals, and I knew that every man in that section was interested in a good horse.

By the time I had put up my beasts and ordered supper there were at least a dozen men collected at the hotel, looking at and evidently talking about me.

While I was at the table I could see them peering in at the window and open door, and I began to feel somewhat annoyed by their uncivil curiosity, so different from anything I had before met with in the West.

By the time I had finished and sauntered out to the porch, the crowd had increased to the number of at least thirty. I seemed to detect a threatening air in their muttered talk and sidelong glances at me.

As I sat down in one of the battered chairs, the

Why I should be the "cynosure of every eye," I could not at first imagine.

crowd, as by common consent, massed together at the foot of the steps leading up to the porch, and what seemed to be a committee of investigation detached itself from the rest, and came up to where I sat. The foremost, a small, quiet man, with a grizzled beard and a cool grey eye drew near and addressed me.

"Stranger, I'd like to ask you a few questions," he said, gravely.

"All right, drive on!" I answered, curtly, for I was beginning to grow angry at what I considered the impertinent attention of which I was the object.

"What might your name be?"

"It might be Smith," I replied, derisively.

"And where might you be from?"

"China."

"Where did you get that horse you're riding?"

"Stole him, of course!" sarcastically.

"Reckon you did, but you are pretty cheeky to acknowledge it. I'm the sheriff of this county, and I'll have to ask you to come with me."

"Come with you? Where? What do you mean?"

"I mean I'll have to arrest you till this matter is settled."

"Arrest me! What matter?" I gasped, thoroughly taken aback.

"Till you can prove how you came by that horse."

"What do you mean? You don't take me for a horse-thief, do you?"

"That's just it, so come along."

"Pshaw!" broke in another of the committee, "What's the use talking? Hain't he split on himself and 'knowledged he stole the hoss?"

"But, gentlemen," I spoke up alarmed, for matters seemed to be growing serious. "it's all a mistake. The horse is mine, or at least, my brother's."

"Mebbe your brother's name is Smith, too?" queried one of the committee, grimly sarcastic.

"The way of it is just this," broke in the sheriff. "One of these horses you have here, I think, is John Percy's riding-horse, and when I was over on the Mancos about a week ago he told me he'd been stolen—"

"Yes," I interrupted eagerly, "so he was, but he came home the next day."

"That's too thin!" growled one of the others, while the sheriff went on:

"And I promised to keep a lookout for him. You may be his brother, as you say," he added, doubtfully, "but I've known him for ten years, and never knew he had a brother. Besides, you and he don't favour each other very much."

That was true; two brothers were never probably more unlike in personal appearance than John and I. He was of medium height, massively built, with coal black hair and eyes. I was tall, slender, and very decidedly blonde.

"But I tell you I am his brother!" I answered, energetically.

"Haven't you got anything about you that will prove it?"

I searched my pockets thoroughly, but I could not find a scrap of anything to prove my personal identity. My note-book and a few letters, addressed to myself, I had left in my other coat. The crowd, which by this time, had surged up the steps, began to growl ominously.

The sheriff went on:

"If you are Percy's brother, what are you doing over here? He told me he was camped on Lost Cañon, and was going to leave for Montezuma Valley in a few days."

"So we are, and I am on my way to Animas to get some provisions before we move."

"How are ye goin' to get over?" asked one of the crowd.

"Pack it on the other horse."

"Ye ain't got no pack-saddle, and even if ye be a

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tenderfoot, ye ought to know ye can't pack grub on a bareback hoss."

"But John has an *aparejo* in Animas, and I am going to get it."

"Whar's the happy-rayo at?"

Just then, when I needed it most, my treacherous memory played me false. For the life of me—and it began to look as if it were for my life, indeed—I could not remember the name of the man in whose care the *aparejo* was left.

The crowd watched me with lowering looks, and the growls, meanwhile, were becoming more ominous than ever.

Another investigator spoke up:

"Where did ye get that hoss ye're leading?"

"She's John's, too."

"Bought her mighty lately, then. Didn't have her last summer when I saw him in Silverton."

As I did not know when John had bought the mare I could say nothing.

"Boys," went on the other, "I'm blamed if I don't b'lieve that's the mar' was stole from Jim Pate at Hermosa a couple o' months ago."

"Didn't he say it was a bay filly, four year old, with a white star in her forrid?"

"That's so!" "That's the critter!" "He's stole 'em both!" "Stretch his neck for him!" were some of the cries that broke from the crowd, and a rush was made in my direction.

The sheriff had been standing quietly by while this colloquy was going forward. But now, quick as a flash, he caught me by the arm with a grip of steel, whirled me behind him, and the long barrel of his revolver was levelled in the face of the angry mob.

"None of that, boys," he said, coolly. "No hanging here, please."

"But he's a horse-thief!" yelled some in the crowd.

"Maybe he is, though I don't more than half believe it. But even if he is, I'm the sheriff of the county and it's my place to see he has a fair trial. Come, now, boys, I don't want any fuss, but—you—can't—have—this—man." and each word fell with a slow, ringing determination in the accent, which showed the mettle of the man. The crowd evidently knew that he was determined, for no one stirred, and there was dead silence for a minute, till someone in the rear called out:

"What ye feared of? Goin' ter let one man bluff ye? Make a rush. He won't shoot nobody."

"Ah, Bob Lowder, is that you? Spoilin' for a fight, as usual! If you want the man why don't you come and take him? Stand back, boys, and give Lowder a chance to show his 'sand.'"

The shot told; and with the proverbial fickleness of a mob, the men burst out laughing, while cries went up:

"That's it!" "Give Lowder a chance!" "Pitch in, Bob!" "Ye ain't afeard o' one man!" "Oh, no, Harry Lee won't shoot!"

But Lowder failed to come forward, and Lee turning to me, said:

"Well, cap, I don't more than half believe you're a horse-thief, but I'll have to take care of you till we can straighten this thing out. Come, boys, go home and go to bed. I'll tend to this man."

"But," I objected, growing bolder as the danger seemed to lessen, "you have no warrant for me and you have no right to arrest me without one."

"Well, we don't go much on warrants out in this country; but if you insist on it, these boys can furnish you one in five minutes, signed by Judge Lynch."

The hint was sufficient for me, and saying, laughingly: "Thank you; I believe I will not insist on it," I followed him through the crowd of roughly-dressed miners, which opened to let us pass.

As soon as we were out of the crowd and away from the hotel, he said to me:

"Lucky for ye I was here to-night. Those fellows are pretty well stirred up. There've a good many horses been stole around here lately; and they've sworn to hang the first horse thief they catch. They're sober now; but if they get a little liquor in them—and they

The long barrel of his revolver was levelled at the angry mob.

seem to be stringing over to Lowder's saloon—there'll be trouble. By the way, I'll trouble you for your pistol."

I gave it to him, objecting at the same time and remarking that if there were to be a fight, it would be as well that both of us should be armed.

"But there ain't going to be any fight; I'm going to slip you off up the gulch, and if them fellows, when they get good and drunk, want to tackle an empty cabin, why let 'em. I have got to take you to Animas, and I'll do it, dead or alive."

I hastened to assure him that he need fear no attempt at escape on my part. We soon reached his cabin. As we entered it he said:

"Hold on, I've got a better idea than that gulch business. I say, Jim!" and a boy about [illegible]een years old

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made his appearance, whom I afterwards found to be his son.

"Jim, go and saddle old Dick and ride up the Mancos trail. If anybody sees you, tell him you are going to the saw-mill to see Nellie. You go there sometimes, don't you?"

"Yes, sir," the lad answered, with a blush.

"Well, when you come to the old Ute trail turn off, and it'll lead you into the Animas road, just be ow the ford. Hitch Dick there and slip up the creek to the hotel. Tell Mam Frenchy I sent you after the two horses this man left there. Take 'em down the creek to the ford, and we'll meet you there."

Jim departed; and Lee said to me:

"We'll slip out of the back door and into the brush and make for the ford. Wait till I strike a light, so if anybody's watching they'll think we are here."

The door was opened by the yawning landlord.

The lamp lighted, we stole out of the back door and in a minute were safely hidden in the brush which clothed the mountain side. Striking into a trail that led along the side of the hill, half-an-hour's brisk walk brought us to the ford, upon the hither side of which we found old Dick hitched to a sapling.

After a half-hour of waiting, which I improved in strengthening Lee's impression that I had told the truth, we heard a clatter of hoofs up the road. Pulling me back into the thick bushes, Lee waited till the rider or riders were within a hundred yards or so, when he gave a low, mournful hoot like that of the small barred owl. It was answered from the road, and we stepped out, as Jim came clattering up, riding Rob, and leading the mare, both saddled and bridled.

"They saw me," Jim gasped out, breathlessly, "just as I was getting out of the corral, and hollered to me to stop. There was Bob Lowder and big Aleck and Caleb Jones, and about a dozen more. I didn't stop, and they fired at me, but they didn't hit me."

"I'll settle with Bob Lowder for that," growled Lee.

"I knew they would catch me in the bush, so I took to the road and came a-whoopin'," said Jim. "I reckon they've gone for their horses and will be after us pretty quick. They seemed to be just drunk enough to play the mischief. There they come now!" as the breeze bore to our ears the faint tramp of hoofs from up the road.

While Jim was talking, Lee had mounted old Dick and I had sprung to the saddle of the mare.

"What kind of a beast is she?" asked Lee, as we plunged into the ford.

"Which, the Witch? Fastest horse in the country next to Rob here," said I.

"Well, old Dick can keep up with the funeral, I guess," and we climbed to the further bank and dashed away at full speed. Having ridden about three miles, we pulled up and listened.

No sound behind.

"Guess they've given it up for a bad job," said Jim; and we rode on at an easier pace.

Just as we were entering Animas, I happened to remember that I had met, two or three months before, in Silverton, the landlord of the Animas City hotel; and mentioning this circumstance to Lee, I suggested that before he took me to the lock-up, we should ride around to the hotel and see whether he could identify me.

Lee agreed, and we were soon hammering at the hotel door, which was opened by the yawning landlord, half-dressed and with a lamp in his hand.

"Hello, sheriff! That you? What ye doing here at this time o' night?" he drawled out.

"Do you know this man, Cummings?" asked Lee.

"I—ah!—let me see," said the sleepy landlord, holding up the lamp and peering into my face, while I waited anxiously, for I feared, should the test fail, that Lee's confidence in me would be badly shaken.

"I—no—yes; it's Mr. Percy, brother of John Percy of Silverton."

"Sure of it?"

"Well, John introduced him to me as his brother and I reckon he ought to know."

"Yes, I reckon so. Well, Mr. Percy, I'm glad it's all right, and if you are ever taken up again for horse-stealing, you can call on me."

The matter was explained to the wondering landlord, and we all went to bed.

The next day having made my purchases, Lee, Jim and I returned to Parrott City, where the sheriff's explanation set me all right.

I afterwards became very well acquainted with many of my would-be lynchers and had many a joke with them over the time when they were so earnestly bent upon hanging me as a horse-thief.

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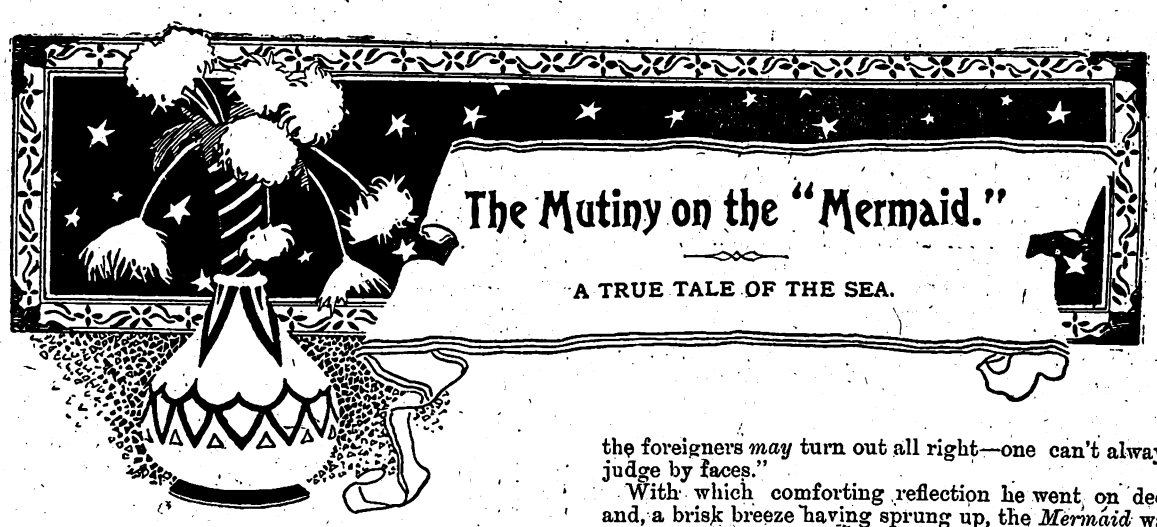

The Mutiny on the "Mermaid."

A TRUE TALE OF THE SEA.

CAPTAIN JOHN GOW, his weather-beaten countenance wearing an expression of deep anxiety, slowly descended the companion-ladder and entered his cabin.

He had just come aboard the *Mermaid* after two busy days on shore, and the brief conversation he had held with his first-mate had served to put the usually-cheery skipper in anything but a comfortable frame of mind. Good reason he had to be anxious; for the *Mermaid* had on board a very valuable cargo, including bullion and other specie alone worth some £12,000. Freight of such a precious nature is a source of anxiety to a captain even when he is served by the most trustworthy and loyal of crews. What, then, must it be when, as in the present instance, the whole of the mast hands are strangers—two of them evil-looking foreigners?

Briefly, the occurrences which led up to this unsatisfactory state of things were as follows:

After a long and exceedingly rough voyage from England, Captain Gow had, some six weeks previously, landed a miscellaneous cargo at New York. This done, the much-damaged *Mermaid* had been docked for repairs, during the progress of which, every man of her old crew had deserted. When, therefore, the vessel was once more in sea-going order, it was, of course, necessary to engage a fresh crew for the return voyage to Liverpool.

A few days before our story opens, Captain Gow had been offered a valuable cargo, and it was the negotiations in respect to this that had necessitated his prolonged absence on shore.

The engaging of a crew had been left in the hands of his first mate, Bob Matthews, who had sailed with him for nearly ten years, and who could be relied on to arrange matters well in the absence of his skipper.

When, however, the latter came aboard, Matthews met him with the news that such was the scarcity of disengaged seamen, that he had been compelled to make up a full complement by taking on a couple of foreigners. One of these was a Spaniard, the other a Frenchman; and from the glimpse Captain Gow had caught of them as they stood near the fo'c'sle, the opinion he had formed of the pair was far from favourable.

However, there was nothing for it but to make shift with the very "scratch" crew. "After all," ruminated the skipper, "it's no use meeting trouble half way, and the foreigners *may* turn out all right—one can't always judge by faces."

With which comforting reflection he went on deck and, a brisk breeze having sprung up, the *Mermaid* was shortly afterwards homewards bound.

* * * * *

During the first three days out, the conduct of José Rodriguez and Henri Maupas was distinctly good. Both were first-rate seamen, and as he noted the neat manner in which they did their work, Captain Gow began to feel almost ashamed of his suspicions.

But on the fourth day, events happened which caused his former uneasiness to return. The skipper of the *Mermaid* had just finished his dinner, when the first-mate entered the cabin hurriedly, his big tanned face working with intense excitement.

"Hullo! what's up, Bob?" inquired Gow, pausing in the act of lighting his pipe.

"Mutiny!" gasped Matthews.

The captain sprang to his feet.

"What d'you say?" he exclaimed, hoarsely.

"Mutiny—nothin' less!" the mate replied, helping himself to a glass of brandy, with trembling hands. "There's no great harm done yet, but murder's brewin' as sure as Fate! Rodriguez and the Frenchman are both mad drunk—they brought a lot o' liquor aboard somehow, and they've been servin' out grog to the other hands. All the afternoon the Spaniard's been disobeyin' orders, and now the Frenchie and three or four more o' the men are growlin' and cursin' in a way I don't like."

"We must clap the scoundrels in irons."

"That's what we mustn't do at present."

"Why not? It's the only way to prevent the mutiny spreading."

"If you'll excuse me for sayin' so, cap'n, it's just the very thing as would bring about trouble. The men have been swillin' raw rum all the afternoon, and they've about reached that ugly state when a word from Rodriguez would make 'em knife us in a twinklin'. That Spanish chap's got a deal o' influence over the crew, and it's my belief he could get 'em to do anythin'."

After a little further argument, Captain Gow was reluctantly won over by the first-mate's counsels. He abandoned the idea of putting the two foreigners in irons—for the present, at any rate. Whilst the men were under the influence of raw spirit, it would have been highly dangerous to meddle with the mutinous ringleaders.

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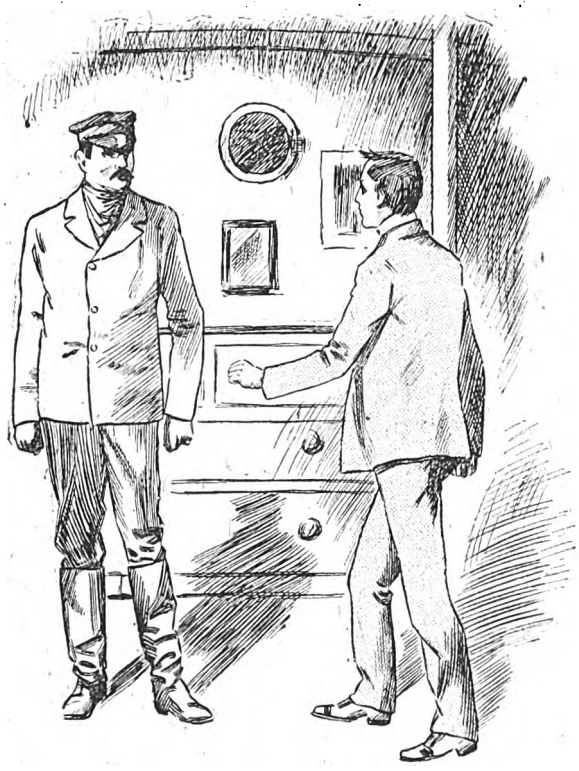
But in order to prevent further intoxication, Matthews and the second-mate—a young fellow named Harvey—were instructed to search the men's quarters on the following day, and to confiscate what remained of the rum which Rodriguez and Maupas had smuggled aboard.

The men had just finished breakfast early on the next morning, when Matthews and Harvey entered to carry out their search.

Captain Gow anxiously paced the quarter-deck, his ears on the alert for any sound of revolt. What he



"Mr. Matthews is not to be found, sir."

dreaded soon happened; for the two mates had scarcely been in the fo'c'sle a couple of minutes, when the skipper heard voices raised in angry dispute.

Then followed the sound of a violent scuffle from the direction of the companion-way.

At this, Captain Gow made a pre-arranged signal to his steward, who instantly appeared with a brace of loaded pistols. Armed with these, the skipper ran to the fo'c'sle, to find that Maupas had thrown Harvey, the second-mate, across the "heel" of the bowsprit, and was gripping him fiercely by the throat.

Bob Matthews was engaged in a furious struggle with Rodriguez, whilst the remainder of the crew looked on and yelled words of encouragement to the foreigners.

Captain Gow took in matters at a glance, and seeing that only prompt measures could save Harvey from being strangled, he covered the Frenchman with a pistol, shouting as he did so:

"Leave him alone, or I'll shoot you dead!"

Maupas looked round, saw the threatening muzzle pointed at his head, and, with a curse, did as he was commanded.

"Up into the foretop, all of you!" roared the skipper, "and venture to come down at your peril."

The men sullenly obeyed.

Rodriguez, having disengaged himself from the first-mate's embrace, was about to follow, when Captain Gow gripped him by the shoulder, and, with the assistance of the mates put the Spaniard in irons.

This done, the steward was dispatched for another brace of pistols, and Matthews and Harvey mounted guard over the mutineers, whilst the skipper entered the fo'c'sle to search for the hidden rum. He soon found a large quantity of the liquor in Rodriguez' locker, and this being safely secured, he returned to the deck.

Then, in a few brief words, he remonstrated with the crew on their mutinous behaviour and on their weakness in being so easily led by a couple of foreign scoundrels, and concluded by expressing a hope that during the remainder of the voyage they would do their duty as honest seamen should.

Apparently quite ashamed of themselves, the men sheepishly muttered regrets, and promised that in future the captain should have no cause for complaint. On the strength of this promise, they were allowed to descend from the foretop, and with the exception of Maupas, who was now placed in irons and secured with his Spanish accomplice, the crew of the *Mermaid* went about their work as though nothing had happened.

On the following afternoon Captain Gow visited the prisoners, who were confined in the vessel's hold. So eloquently did they plead for forgiveness and so profuse were they in their expressions of repentance, that the skipper eventually agreed to release them. This he would not have done, however, had it not been for the fact that he could ill spare a couple of his crew in the working of the ship.

For the next few days he had no reason to regret his clemency, for every man on board went about his duties well and quietly, so that it really seemed as though they were ashamed of their recent behaviour.

It was on the fifth night after the mutinous outbreak, that the next disquieting occurrence of this eventful voyage happened. Going on deck during the mid-watch, Captain Gower ordered all hands to shorten sail. This duty was usually superintended by Bob Matthews, but, on the present occasion, the first-mate was requested to station himself near the fo'c'sle. The night being pitch dark and very rough, the skipper next ordered several sails to be taken in, and this being done to his satisfaction, half the men were allowed to turn in.

The captain himself also entered his cabin; but suddenly bethinking himself of some instructions he desired to give his first officer, Bob Matthews was sent for.

Five minutes passed, and the mate did not answer the summons. Captain Gow began to grow uneasy, a vague consciousness of impending evil took hold of him. He was just about to leave his cabin and ascertain why Matthews did not come, when the steward entered out of breath and with a face the colour of ashes.

"Mr. Matthews is not to be found, sir!" he exclaimed.

"Nonsense!" retorted the skipper, and, without another word, dashed past the steward and up on to the deck.

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He anxiously questioned the watch, and then the men who had turned in were ordered up and interrogated, but all stoutly declared that they had seen nothing of the missing man.

Lanterns were lighted, and every nook and cranny of the vessel thoroughly searched. But to no avail, and at last Captain Gow announced that Matthews must have

Mr. Matthews told his story.

accidentally stumbled overboard in the darkness. This opinion he expressed loudly in the hearing of the crew; but in his heart he knew there had been no accident. That Bob Matthews had met with a violent end at the hands of some of the crew, the captain of the *Mermaid* entertained not the slightest doubt.

Sad at heart, he repaired to his cabin, and sat down to think out a course of action. Suddenly he rose, and accompanied by the second mate, went the round of the ship, taking possession of every firearm that could be found. These were quickly loaded and placed in the cabin in readiness for any attack. Then after warning Harvey and the steward to be on the alert, Captain Gow threw himself wearily on his bunk.

For about half-an-hour he tossed restlessly about; unable to sleep, or to think of anything but the terrible fate of his old ship-mate Matthews.

As he lay thus, he was suddenly startled by hearing a succession of knocks under the ship's counter, just beneath the cabin window. The skipper instantly jumped up, crossed over, carefully opened the window, and inquired in a low whisper:

"Who's there?"

"It's me, Cap'n."

It was the voice of the missing mate!

To throw out a rope and haul Bob Matthews through the window, was the work of a few moments. Then as the skipper wrung the other's hand, and assisted in divesting him of his wet clothing, Matthews told his story.

It appeared that upon going to the fo'c'sle, as instructed, he had been suddenly seized from behind by the two foreigners, and thrown overboard, the cries he uttered being totally drowned by the roar of the gale.

Fortunately, however, he was a powerful swimmer, and as the *Mermaid* was not making much way on account of her top-sails being clewed down, he succeeded in getting alongside her.

Another piece of good fortune awaited him in the shape of a rope, which was accidently hanging astern; and, gripping this, he had been towed along for some time in the ship's eddy.

By a superhuman effort he had at last caught hold of a rudder-chain and drawn himself up on to the "jog" of the rudder, where he had prudently lain until the search for him had ended. The rest is known to the reader.

* * * * *

To no single soul on board did Captain Gow make known the fact of Bob Matthew's reappearance. He had obvious reasons for keeping it a secret. During the remainder of the voyage, the first mate was confined in a vacant cabin next to the captain's, who himself supplied him with meals and anything else he required.

No further mutiny was attempted by the crew; so that it was clear that the foreigners had been actuated to their cowardly deed by the sole motive of revenge.

And so, at last, the *Mermaid* sailed up the Mersey, and anchored one bright morning at Liverpool. While the vessel was being warped in dock, Captain Gow quietly sent the steward ashore with a message. Then he stepped below, to reappear a quarter of an hour later with his arm linked in that of Bob Matthews.

A strange scene ensued. On catching sight of the first mate, some of the men uttered cries of superstitious fear, whilst others stood as though petrified, their eyes bulging from their sockets at the sight of the man who was thought to be dead.

As for José Rodriguez and Henri Maupas, it would be difficult to exaggerate the state of their terror. Their brutal faces took on a leaden hue, great beads of perspiration rolled from their foreheads, and they crouched against the mainmast, mumbling unintelligible words and gazing at Matthews with horror-stricken eyes.

And thus they stood when the steward returned with a couple of stalwart police-officers; and, still cowed and mumbling, they allowed themselves to be taken into custody.

In due course the pair stood their trial on a charge of mutiny and attempted murder on the high seas. "Guilty!" was the verdict returned, and, uttering despairing shrieks for mercy, Rodriguez and Maupas were led away to serve the sentence passed upon them—penal servitude for the term of their natural lives.

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SHORT STORIES THAT MAKE YOU LAUGH.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "Guilty Gold," by Headon Hill, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, April 8th. Post-cards only, please. The prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. J. W. Crow, 36 Willingham Street, Grimsby, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus *.

"Does this climate agree with you?"

"Yes," answered the weather prophet. "It agrees with me, but not with my predictions."

"My son writes that chasing Boers is frightfully hard work."

"Well, the world is round. Write to him to sit down somewhere, and wait till they catch up with him."

PHLETT: "When a man is in love everything about looks different to him."

Brett: "Yes. It's the same when he knocks his head against a lamp-post."

CRITEEK: "That American Napoleon of Finance whom you have written up in to-day's paper, must be a man of enormous longevity."

Editor: "Why?"

Criteek: "You say, 'He is reported to have made six million dollars in as many years.'"

BROWN: "Have you heard about Edison's latest invention?"

Jones: "No, what is it?"

Brown: "A collar-button with a little phonograph inside that will call out when it rolls into a dark corner under the bed, 'Here I am! Here I am!'"

A FULLY-EQUIPPED fashion-plate huntsman met a young farmer in the roadway and inquired:

"Beg pawdon, young man, but can you tell me whethaw there are any wabbits awound heah?"

"Plenty of them," was the ready reply; "but don't let that worry you, they're harmless."

WE are assured by one of our readers that the following story is a fact:

One of the dentists at a leading health resort is also an energetic colonel of Volunteers. A general officer called one day to have a tooth out.

"Very sorry, sir, but Colonel ——— is on parade."

"Well, then, I will see his assistant, Mr. Smith."

"Very sorry, sir, but Captain Smith is also on parade."

Then the General got impatient.

"Haven't you," he exclaimed, "a bally Admiral on the premises who can pull my tooth out."

---

* THE following took place some time ago during the progress of a football match at Newcastle. An elderly spectator was indulging in frequent nips from his pocket-flask, no doubt as a preventative against cold, the weather being anything but conducive to excessive perspiration, when a Northumbrian football enthusiast, probably riled at receiving no invitation to partake of some refreshment, and unable to keep quiet any longer, very dryly remarked:

"I say, mister, th'art a gran' dribbler, but, begor, th'art a poor han' at passin'."

"I HAVEN'T been down to the office for three days."

"Ill?"

"No; my family are going away and I've been helping them find the keys to the trunks."

"ALICE, I do hope you are not getting to be too fond of that young man who lives next door."

"But, mamma, you know we are told to love our neighbours. And I do."

"MR. GROUCH went to a masquerade the other evening disguised as a bear."

"Did anyone recognise him?"

"Only his wife."

MOTHER (to baby): "It's muzzer's little ootsy tootsy; muzzer loves her little darling baby."

Fanny (who has just been spanked): "Don't you believe her, baby. When you (sob) grow up she'll spank you, t-t-too."

ANGELA (to whom Edgar has been proposing): "Tell me, Edgar! Did you ever say anything like this to any woman before?"

Edgar (in a burst of honesty): "My dear girl, do you think it could be done like that the first time?"

"I HAVE called," said the reporter, "to see if you wish to add anything to our account of your wife's reception this evening. We have most of the details and a long list of names, including those who will assist her in receiving."

"No," replied the business man, "there's only one account that I'm expected to take any interest in, and there'll be no one to assist me with that."

MR. Z is an ardent stamp-collector, and recently purchased a rare specimen. On showing it to a brother philatelist, Mr. A, the latter pronounced it a forgery. Next day Mr. A said to Mr. B (who is deaf): "Z has a stamp which, in my opinion, is a forgery on the face of it."

Mr. B to Mrs. B: "Mr. A tells me that, in his opinion, Z has got the stamp of a forger in his face."

Mrs. B to Mrs. C: "I hear that Mr. Z is suspected of being a forger."

Mrs. C to Mrs. D: "Have you heard the news? They've found out that Mr. Z is a forger; but his little game has received a check."

Mrs. D to Mrs. E: "Isn't it dreadful? Mr. Z has been arrested for forging somebody's name on a cheque."

Mrs. E to Mrs. F: "They say that Mr. Z has been forging cheques wholesale, and is now in prison."

Mrs. F to Mrs. E: "I'm not surprised. I always said there was something wrong about him; and the airs his wife puts on too!"

And Mrs. Z now wonders why all her former acquaintances cut her dead when they meet her.

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"Papa, what's the best kind of paper for a kite?"
"Er—fly-paper, my son."

"It's all very well," said the grave-digger, "to advise a young man to begin at the bottom and work upwards; but in my business it ain't practicable."

Bridget: "I will give yez me answer in a week, Larry."
Larry: "That's roight, me darlint, take plinty av toime to think it over. But tell me one thing now—will it be yes or no?"

She: "Everyone in town says we are going to be married."
He: "Well, it's true, isn't it?"
She (sobbingly): "It can't be true, Frederick. You must be deceiving me. If it were true everyone in town would say we were not going to be married."

They were discussing gas bills, the subject being a common one at this place, if not a popular one.
"If you use only a little gas, and are as economical as you can be, the bill is just as big," said Hiland.
"Then why not use a great deal?" suggested Halket.
"I tried that, and the bill was three times as much."

"I am going to sea," the young man said, and paused.
The young girl gasped.
"Oh, Henry—er—Mr. Timmid!"
She could not conceal the tears in her voice.
"I am going to see," he repeated, "your father to-night, if you will give me permission."
Then she fell upon his shoulder.

A lazy and loquacious farmer called at a neighbour's house one morning.
"Sit down, sit down!" exclaimed the neighbour.
"I don't know as I ought," replied the farmer but nevertheless he sat down.
After some talk about the crops, and the value of an adjoining piece of land, the visitor said slowly:
"I don't know as I ought to be sitting here. I came over to see if I could get a ladder; our house is a-fire."

Once when a certain well-known judge was trying a case, he was disturbed by a young man who kept moving about in the rear of the court-room, lifting chairs and looking under things.
"Young man," said his lordship, "you are making a great deal of unnecessary noise. What are you about?"
"My lord," replied the young man, "I have lost my overcoat, and am trying to find it."
"Well," said the venerable judge, with a grim smile, "people often lose whole suits in here without making all that disturbance."

During a severe engagement with the Boers, a young fellow who was a great favourite with the girls at home, was badly wounded in the right arm.
Several of the surgeons declared that it would be necessary to amputate the limb, but it was finally decided that by removing a section of the bone the arm might be saved.
"But," said one of the surgeons, "it will be a bad job, and when healed, the arm will remain crooked."
"Never mind the crook," replied the young fellow; "set it for hugging and go ahead."

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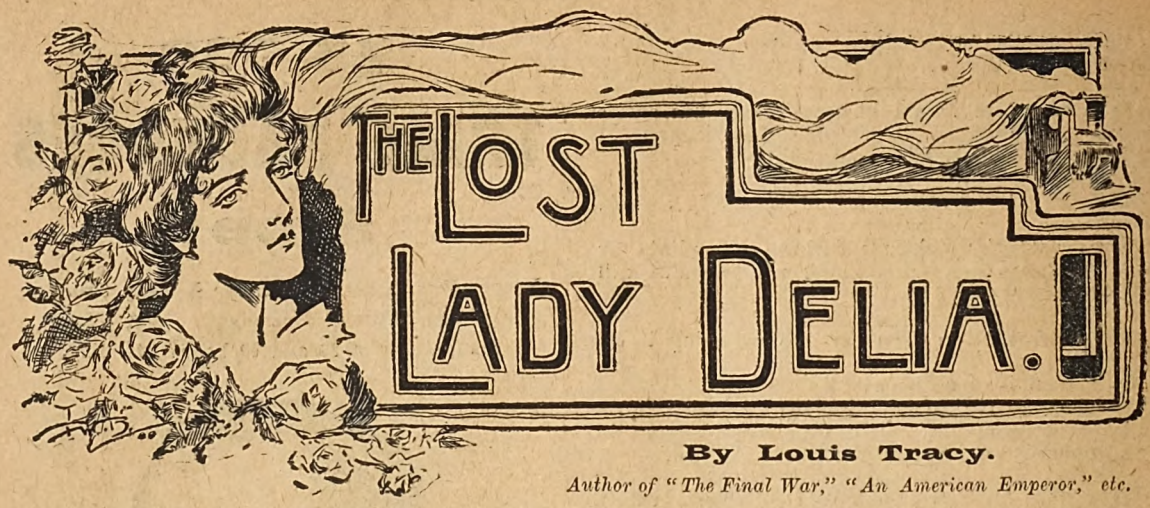

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

CHAPTER XXX. (*continued*).

Reasoning in this way I rapidly resolved to make a bold effort to conceal for ever the time and place of the fatality. If I failed I could still tell the truth; If I succeeded I might, at my own expense, save a vast amount of unnecessary sorrow.

The desperate expedient came to me of carrying off the body to the untenanted house at Putney where my old master had resided until his death, utilising the four-wheeled cab with its half-drunken driver for the purpose.

If I reached Putney unhindered I could dispose of my terrible burthen easily, for the river flowed past the grounds, and every inch of the locality was known to me.

It occurred to me that perhaps the body might be found and recognised. Our personal linen was never marked, by reason of the fact that our laundry work was done upon our Yorkshire estate, but as a temporary safeguard I resolved to take some different and less valuable outer clothes from Mrs. Hilmer's residence.

Her maid was of similar build to my wife, so I hastened to the girl's room and laid hands upon a soiled coat and skirt which were relegated to the recesses of the wardrobe.

I glanced at my watch as I came back along the corridor. It was 6.15 p.m. All the incidents I have related to you had happened within a quarter of an hour. Oh, Heaven! it seemed longer than all the preceding years of my life.

Having resolved upon a line of conduct, I pursued it with the *sang froid* and accuracy of one of the superior scoundrels delineated by Du Boisgobey. The door of the flat was locked. If the servants, hardly due yet, returned unexpectedly, I would send them off to Victoria Station on some imaginary errand of their mistress'.

I knelt beside my poor wife's body once more, and with some difficulty took off her costume and loosely fastened on the maid's garments.

In her purse there were some bulky documents, which I afterwards discovered to be the reports furnished by a firm of private detectives, detailing all my movements with reference to Raleigh Mansions with surprising accuracy. But she had concealed her name. These men themselves only knew me as "Colonel Montgomery." How Delia first came to suspect me I can only guess. Perhaps my indifference, my absence from home at definite hours, a chance meeting in the street unknown to me—any of these may have supplied the initial cause and led her to verify her doubts before taxing me with my supposed iniquity.

Indeed, her final act in coming alone to Mrs. Hilmer's abode showed her fearless spirit and independent methods. She intended no divorce court revelations. She would have simply spurned me as an unworthy and dishonourable wretch. Her small personal belongings I put in my pockets; the clothes I made into a parcel and stuffed temporarily beneath my overcoat.

Then I unlocked the door and went down the few steps to the main entrance. There was no one about, the fog and sleet having cleared the street—a quiet thoroughfare at all times.

I took the risk of the maids coming back, and I ran to the square for my conveyance. The driver had been improving the occasion, and was more inebriated than before. He brought his cab to the door, and I knew, by the appearance of things, that no one had entered during my absence.

With some difficulty I took Delia's body into my arms in as natural a position as was possible, and half-dragged, half-carried her to the cab, leaving the door of the flat ajar. Luck still favoured me. The cabman supposed that she, like himself, was intoxicated. A man came down the opposite side of the street, but he paid not the slightest heed to me, and, indeed, we were but dimly visible to each other.

Exerting all my strength unobtrusively I placed my wife on the rear seat of the cab and then calmly gave the driver my instructions. He grumbled at the distance, but I told him I would pay him handsomely. Searching in my pockets and Delia's purse I could only find some twelve shillings, so, although it was risky, to avoid a quarrel with the man I determined to give him a five-pound note.

So far all had gone well.

The notion possessed me that, to all intents and purposes, I had murdered my wife, and that I was now disposing of the visible tokens of my guilt in the most approved manner of a daring criminal. Whether I did right or wrong I cannot, even at this late hour, decide. Should my death induce forgetfulness I am still inclined to think that I acted for the best. My wife was dead; I was self-condemned. Why, then, allow others, wholly innocent, to be dragged into the vortex?

This was my line of thought. If you, reading this ghastly narrative, shudder at my deeds, I pray you nevertheless to weigh in the balance the good and the ill that resulted from my actions.

At last we reached Putney, and drew up at the end of the disused lane which runs down by the side of the house to the river.

Here, again, the road was deserted. I lifted my wife out, carried her to the postern-gate, and returned to give the driver his note. The man was so amazed at the amount that he whipped up his horse instantly, fearing lest I should change my mind.

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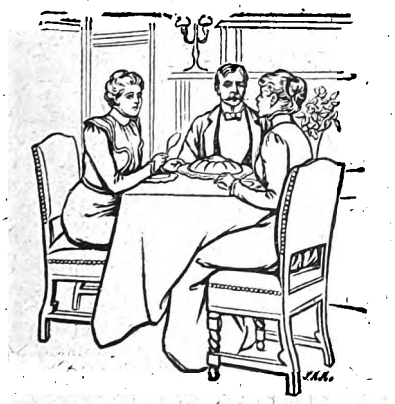
The Old Method and the New

Not without good reason is the present age termed the age of progress. Progress, marked and rapid, is the order of the day in every department of life, including, of course, our domestic and culinary arrangements. For instance, when our grandmothers wished to prepare Jellies for the table, they worked and worried with a multiplicity of materials, and after straining and flavouring and experimenting, the effort frequently ended in failure. To-day the modern housewife with her packet of Chivers' Jelly, produces in a short time, with *a minimum expenditure of trouble and money*, a dainty and wholesome dessert that is a pleasure both to look upon and to taste. Clear, sparkling, and with the fragrance and exquisitely delicate flavour of fruits, Chivers' Gold Medal Jellies are indeed a delight to the eye and palate. To the purity and freshness of the materials employed in their production, as well as the



deal conditions of cleanliness and economy prevailing in Messrs. Chivers' factory, may be attributed the unique reputation and popularity of these celebrated delicacies. Dr. Gordon Stables, R.N., says: "Messrs. Chivers have come to the front with Jellies which really add to our health and luxury. No home is complete without these pure and excellent Jellies." A Baptist minister writes: "My wife considers your Jellies perfection, and I fully endorse her opinion." A London lady writes: "In trying Chivers' and . . . Jellies last week to see which I would prefer for my stall, I bought a packet of each, and found Chivers' infinitely better, both as to freshness of taste and clearness."

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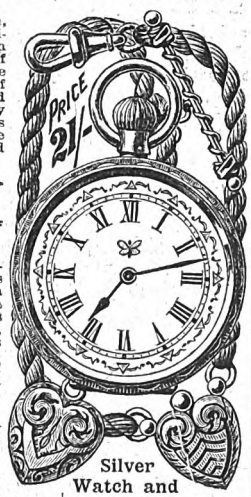

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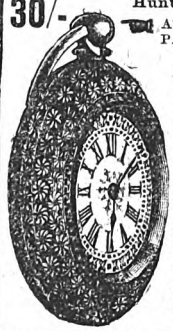

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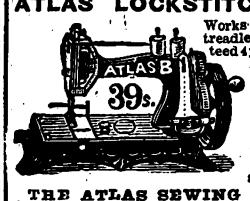

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I was about to force open the old and rickety door into the garden when I remembered the drain-pipe jutting into the Thames—a place where, as a child, I often caused much alarm by surreptitious visits for the purpose of catching minnows. I quickly took off my coat and boots, turned up my trousers and shirt-sleeves, and examined the pipe with my hands.

It exactly suited my purpose. In half-a-minute I had firmly wedged my wife's body beneath it. This was the most horrible portion of my task. The chill water, the desolation of the river bank, the mud and trailing weeds—all these things seemed so vile and loathsome when placed in contact with the mortal remains of my ill-fated Delia.

She had loved me. I believe I loved her, as I assuredly do now when her presence is but a memory, yet I was condemned to commit her to the contaminating beastliness of such surroundings. It was a small matter, in the face of her death, but it has weighed on me since more than any other feature of that cruel night's history.

Before leaving Putney I tied her clothes, hat, and furs to a couple of heavy stones, and threw the parcel into deep water.

By train and cab I reached home but a few minutes late for dinner. It was not difficult for me to act my part with the servants, nor keep up the farce during the weary days that followed. My consciousness was so seared by what I had gone through that the mere make-believe of my position was a positive relief to me.

That night, in the privacy of my room, I recollected the broken fender, and feared lest the ironwork would supply a clue should the body be discovered, a thing I deemed practically impossible.

But, for Mrs Hilmer's sake, I took no risk. Next morning, before I saw you at Tattersall's, I made arrangements for the whole contents of her drawing-room to be transferred to her brother's flat, where, to my knowledge, the articles were needed.

Mrs. Hilmer had gone out early, so the thing was done in her absence. Her amazement was so great that she wired me, using as signature the pet name of her childhood, and this was the first message you heard the groom refer to when he came a second time to the sale with the telegram from Richmond.

I wrote her a hurried note, explaining that I intended the transfer as a sop to her offended brother, but she had to telegraphed again, and I had to go and see her, to learn that Mensmore resented the gift, and had gone off in a huff to Monte Carlo.

A little later I took the supreme step of writing her a farewell letter. Since my wife's death I could not bear to meet any other woman. I communed with my poor Delia more when dead than when alive.

I do not think I have much more to tell you. Step by step I watched you and the police tearing aside my barrier of deceit. At times I thought I would baffle you in the end. Were it not for my folly in bribing Jane Harding I think I must have succeeded.

That poor girl was the undoing of me in the first instance, and she has now brought me my final sentence, for she came to-day and told me, with tears, all that happened between the detective and herself. Winter, too, put in an appearance.

To-morrow, I suppose, he will bring a search warrant if you do not see him first and tell him the truth.

Do not misunderstand me. I am glad of this release. When you strove to arouse me from my despair I did, for a little while, cherish the hope that I might be able to devote my declining years to the work which Delia herself took an interest in. But the web of testimony woven round my old friend, Mensmore; the self-sacrificing spirit of his sister, who, to shield me, was willing to suffer herself; the possibility that I might involve these two, and perhaps others, in my own ruin—every circumstance conspired to overwhelm me.

I can endure no more, my dear Brett. It is ended. The past is already a dream to me—the future a void. My poor nature was not designed to stand such a strain. The cord of existence has snapped, and I cannot bring myself to think that it will be mended again. In bidding you farewell I ask one thing. If you take a charitable view of my deeds, if you consider that my penalty is commensurate with my faults, then you might take my dead hand in yours and say, "This was my friend. I pity him. May the spirit of his wife be merciful unto him should they meet in the regions beyond the grave."

And so, for the last time, I sign myself

Charles Lyle.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Valedictory.

Much as Brett would have liked to inter his dead friend's secret with his mortal remains in the tomb, this was impossible.

Sir Charles Lyle's sacrifice must not be made in vain, and the strange chain of events too strongly incircled other actors in the drama to enable the barrister to adopt the course which would have otherwise have commended itself to him. An early visit to Scotland Yard, where, in company with Mr. Winter, he interviewed the Deputy Commissioner, and a conference with the district coroner settled two important questions. The police were satisfied as to the cause of Lady Delia's death, and the coroner agreed to keep the evidence as to Sir Charles Lyle's sudden collapse strictly within the limits of the medical evidence.

A wholly unnecessary public scandal was thus avoided.

With Lady Delia's relatives his task required considerable tact. Without taking them fully into his confidence he had to explain that Sir Charles had all along known the exact facts bearing upon her death and burial-place, but for family reasons he thought it best not to disclose his knowledge.

Brett needed their corporation in getting the Home Office to give the requisite permission for Lady Delia's re-burial. The circumstance that the deceased baronet had left his unentailed estates to his wife's nephew, joined to the important position Brett occupied as one of the trustees and joint guardian, with the boy's mother, of the young heir, smoothed over many difficulties.

After a harassing and anxious week Brett had the melancholy satisfaction of seeing the remains of the unfortunate couple laid to rest in the stately gloom of the family vault.

The newspapers, of course, scented a mystery in the proceedings, but definite inquiry was barred in every direction. Even the exhumation order gave no clue to the reasons of the authorities for granting it, and in less than the proverbial nine days the incident was forgotten.

Sir Charles had made it a condition precedent to the succession that his heir should bear his name, and should live with his widowed mother on the Yorkshire estate or in the town house for a certain number of months in each year until the boy was old enough to go to a public school.

This stipulation was intended to have the effect of more rapidly bringing his own memory in oblivion. Brett, too, was given a sum of £5,000, "to be expended in bequests as he thought fit."

Reggie understood his motive thoroughly. Jane Harding had been loyal to her master in her way, so he arranged that she should receive an annual income sufficient to secure her from want. Thompson, too, was provided for when the time came that he was too feeble for further employment at Portman Square, and Mr. Winter received a handsome douceur for his services.

Mrs. Hilmer did not even know of Sir Charles Lyle's death until weeks had passed. Acting on Brett's advice her brother simply told her that everything had been settled, and that the authorities concurred with the barrister in the opinion that Lady Delia was accidentally killed.

When she had completely recovered from the shock of the

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belief that her loyal friend had murdered his wife, Mensmore one day told her the whole sad story. But he would allow no more weeping.

"It is time," he said, "that the misery of this episode should cease. When the chief actor in the tragedy gave his life to end the suffering we would but ill meet his wishes by allowing it to unduly occupy our thoughts in the future."

Mensmore's marriage with Phyllis Browne was now definitely fixed for the following autumn, so he carried his sister off with him on a hasty trip to Wyoming in company with Pyne—a journey required for the protection and development of their joint interests in that state.

Not only did their property turn out to be of great and lasting value, but during their absence the Springbok Mine began to boom. Even the cautious Brett one day found himself hesitating whether or not to sell at half over par so excellent were the reports and so extensive the dividends from that auriferous locality.

The two young people were married—a scion of the house had become a lusty two-year-old—Mr. Winter had become Chief Inspector, and Miss Marie le Marchant had, by strenuous effort, risen to the dignity of double-crown posters as a "dashing comedienne"—when Brett's memories of his lost friends were suddenly revived in an unexpected manner.

Mr. Sydney H. Pyne came to him with measured questionings and brooding thought stamped on his brows.

"It's like this," he said, when they settled down to details, "I want to get married."

"To whom?" said Brett, wondering at the savage tone in which the announcement was made.

"To Mrs. Hilmer."

"Oh!"

"That's what everybody yells the moment I mention it. She screams 'Oh!' and runs off with tears in her eyes. Her brother says 'Oh!' and looks uncomfortable, but refuses to discuss the proposition. Now you say 'Oh!' and gaze at me like an owl at the bare statement. What the dickens does it all mean I want to know? I'm not worrying about what happened years ago. Mrs. Hilmer's just the sort of woman I require as a wife, and I'll marry her yet if the whole British nation says 'Oh!' loud enough to be heard and answered by the U—nited States!"

"That's the proper sort of spirit in which to set about the business."

"Yes, sir, but I can't get any forrarder. There's a kind of rock below water which holds me up every time I shoot the rapids. She likes me well enough, I know. She calls me 'Syd' as slick as butter, and I call her 'Gwen,' but there you are—if I want to go ahead a bit she pulls up and weeps. Now why the——"

"Steady, Mr. Pyne. Women weep for many reasons. Do you know her history?"

"No, and I don't want to."

"But perhaps that is exactly what she does want. Remember that she has been married before, with somewhat bitter experience. She probably believes that a husband and wife should have no secrets from each other. Above all else there should be no cloud between them as to bygone events. Mrs. Hilmer is highly sensitive. If she imagined you were under any misapprehension as to the circumstances under which Sir Charles and Lady Delia Lyle met their deaths—do not forget that you were personally mixed up in the affair—she would neither entertain your proposal nor explain her motives. She would just do as you say—run away and cry."

"Well, now, that beats everything," said Pyne admiringly. "That never struck me before."

"It is the probable explanation of her attitude nevertheless."

"Then what am I to do?"

"Write to her. Ask her permission to learn the facts from me. Tell her you believe you understand the reasons for her reticence, and that your only excuse for the request is that you want to go to her on an equal plane of absolute confidence. It seems to me——"

"That I'd better git quick and do it," shouted Pyne, vanishing with the utmost celerity.

Brett still occupied his old chambers in Victoria Street. He did not expect to see Pyne again for a couple of days. To the barrister's utter amazement he returned within ten minutes.

"Fire away!" he cried excitedly. "You struck it first time. I just rang her up——"

"Rang her up?"

"Yes; she's staying at the Cecil for a few days, so I telephoned from the Windsor. I could never put the case in a letter in your words, you know. But switch me on to the end of a wire and I know where I am."

"What on earth did you say?"

"As soon as I got her in the box at the other end I said, 'Is that you, Gwen?' 'Yes,' said she. 'Well,' said I, 'I guess you know who's talking?' 'Quite well,' said she. 'Then,' said I, 'I've just been telling Mr. Brett I wanted to marry you, and that you wouldn't even discuss the proposition. He said you probably wished me to know the whole story of Sir Charles Lyle, but felt kinder shy of telling me yourself. He will get it off his chest if you give him permission, and then I can come along in a hansom and fix things. What do you say?' There was no answer, so I shouted, 'Are you there?' and she said 'Yes,' faint-like. 'Don't let me hurry you,' said I, 'but if you agree straight-away I can catch Brett at home, for I've just left him.' With that she said, 'Very well. You can see Mr. Brett.' And here I am."

"Having accomplished the whole thing satisfactorily."

"As how?"

"Don't you see you have proposed to the lady and practically been accepted?"

"Jehosh! It does look something like it. Say! I'm off! This story of yours will keep until to-morrow."

He would have gone, but Brett jumped after him.

"Not so fast, Mr. Pyne. You must not sail into the Cecil flying a false flag. Kindly oblige me with your attention for the next half-hour."

With that he unlocked a safe and took from its recesses Sir Charles Lyle's "confession." He read the whole of its opening passages, explaining the relations between Mrs. Hilmer and her unfortunate but abiding friend.

The straightforward, honest sentences sounded strangely familiar at this distance of time. Brett was glad of the opportunity for reading them aloud. It seemed a fitting thing that this testimony should come, as it were, from the tomb.

Pyne listened intently to the recital and to Brett's summary of the events that followed.

"Poor chap!" he said, when the sad tale had ended. "I hope you shook hands with him as he asked you to do?"

"I did. Would that my grasp had the power to reassure him of my heartfelt sympathy."

For a little while they were silent.

"So," said Pyne at last, "Gwen thought I would make the same mistake as Lady Delia, and suspect her wrongfully."

"No, not that. But she naturally wished the man whom she could trust as a husband to be wholly cognisant of events in which already he had participated slightly."

"She was right. I like her all the better for it. But, tell me. Is there any necessity for that wonderful document to be preserved?"

"Not the slightest. It has served its last use."

"Then put it in the fire."

Brett did not hesitate a moment to comply with Pyne's wish. The flames devoured the record with avidity, and the two men watched the manuscript crumbling into nothingness. Then Pyne said:

"I must be off to the Cecil."

"Good-bye, old chap," said Brett. "And good luck to you, too. I congratulate both Mrs. Hilmer and yourself."

The End.

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

Is it necessary to remind you again that Headon Hill's fascinating serial story begins next week? I don't suppose it is, for you who have once read a novel by this popular author are naturally on the look-out for other romances from the same entertaining pen. As for you who have not, I can only recommend you strongly to begin

"The Fate of Michael Standridge"

in the next issue of *Short Stories*.

N.B.—If you have a friend who is fond of a thrilling story, you might tell him.

❦❦❦

Two or three weeks ago, I had a note on the "alleged" (as the newspapers, anxious to avoid libel actions, always say) incivility of post-office officials. Here is a letter from "C. S." (Bury St. Edmunds) on the subject:

"I think 'R. P.' has a good deal of ground for his complaint, for from my own experience and that of my numerous acquaintances, incivility and inattention seem to be pretty general in the suburban post-offices. For one who will go out of his or her way to oblige, half-a-dozen will be the reverse.

"Another thing is that many of the branch post-offices in the suburbs of large towns do not depend on the official salary, sale of stamps, etc., for a living; but many—in fact, I might say, all of them—keep some kind of shop in addition, and it is very annoying to be kept a considerable time waiting for stamps—postal orders, etc., while the post-mistress is engaged in selling toys, stationery, or confectionery, to other customers. The post-mistress seems to think that her own business is to come first before the Government.

"This state of things ought not to be allowed. There should be one officer at least to attend to postal affairs, but in some cases there is not one officer, but sometime three or four young (ladies they would like to be called) girls of some thirteen or fourteen years, attending to postal matters, and not seldom making diverse mistakes. The airs these young 'ladies' give themselves when clothed with a little brief authority would be laughable, were it not annoying, when one is tied to time; and occasionally they will venture to be insolent, as far as they dare to be.

"I hold that a Government official has no right to conduct another business in the same department for the use of which the Government pays him or her a fixed salary, to the inconvenience of the public."

What have post-office officials to say in reply to these statements?

❦❦❦

"Badger" (Lewes) raises the old, old question as to "whether brains and muscle are to be found in the same men." In his opinion, the two things are rarely found together, and he goes on to make the sweeping charge that "athletes are the biggest duffers in the world, empty-headed, and lacking all idea of anything beyond sport."

My correspondent is a man of limited observation, and, as such, should refrain from making general statements of a libellous nature. My experience has certainly never taught me that athletic prowess is incompatible with high mental capacity. Gladstone was a physically strong man, fond of out-door exercise, and "empty-headed" was hardly the word to describe him. Baden-Powell, again, is one of the finest all-round athletes in the British Army, but ask anyone who was present with him in beleaguered Mafeking if he was a "duffer." And Conan Doyle, an excellent cyclist, cricketer, and boxer, can hardly be classed among men "lacking ideas." C. B. Fry, a fine cricketer, footballer, and long-jumper, was not undistinguished intellectually when at Oxford. Instances could be multiplied, had we the space.

❦❦❦

A few days ago I had the pleasure of travelling with a well-known 'Varsity athlete, who astonished me by his intimate acquaintance with English poetry. On his way to the country for a few days' training, he was taking with him volumes of Dryden and Browning. His catholicity of mind was further shown in the fact that he is a regular reader of *Short Stories*.

❦❦❦

"Aspirant for the Laureateship" (Lincoln) sends me the following. Readers are requested not to seek to know his name and address. Whatever his verses be, his intention is good. Let that be his excuse:

I've read fiction galore (and hope to read more),
Since the days I read "Little Boy Blue."
I've read Dickens and Scott—in fact, the whole lot
Of the classics of old times and new;
I've felt my hair rise (like the crust over pies),
And my eye-balls start out of my head;
When a dastardly villain began hero-killin'
And painting his hands ghastly red.
I've thrilled to the bone; gone cold as a stone,
At the thought of a poor heroine
Being troubled and pestered, in lone house sequestered,
As many such damsels have been;
But for good, healthy tales (my muse nearly fails)
For men or the opposite sex,
Commend me to him (this is not a mere whim)
Who writes about bold Pontifex.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 4,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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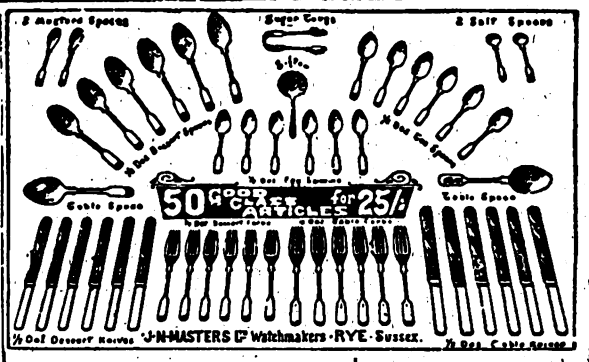

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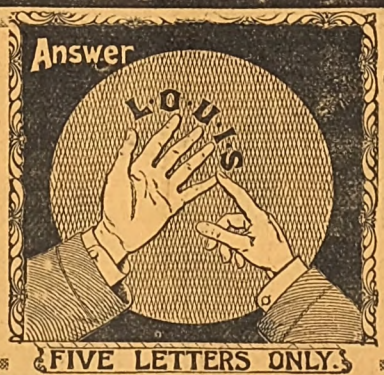

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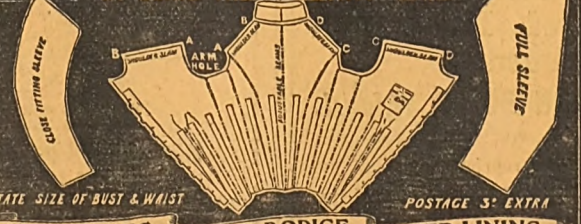

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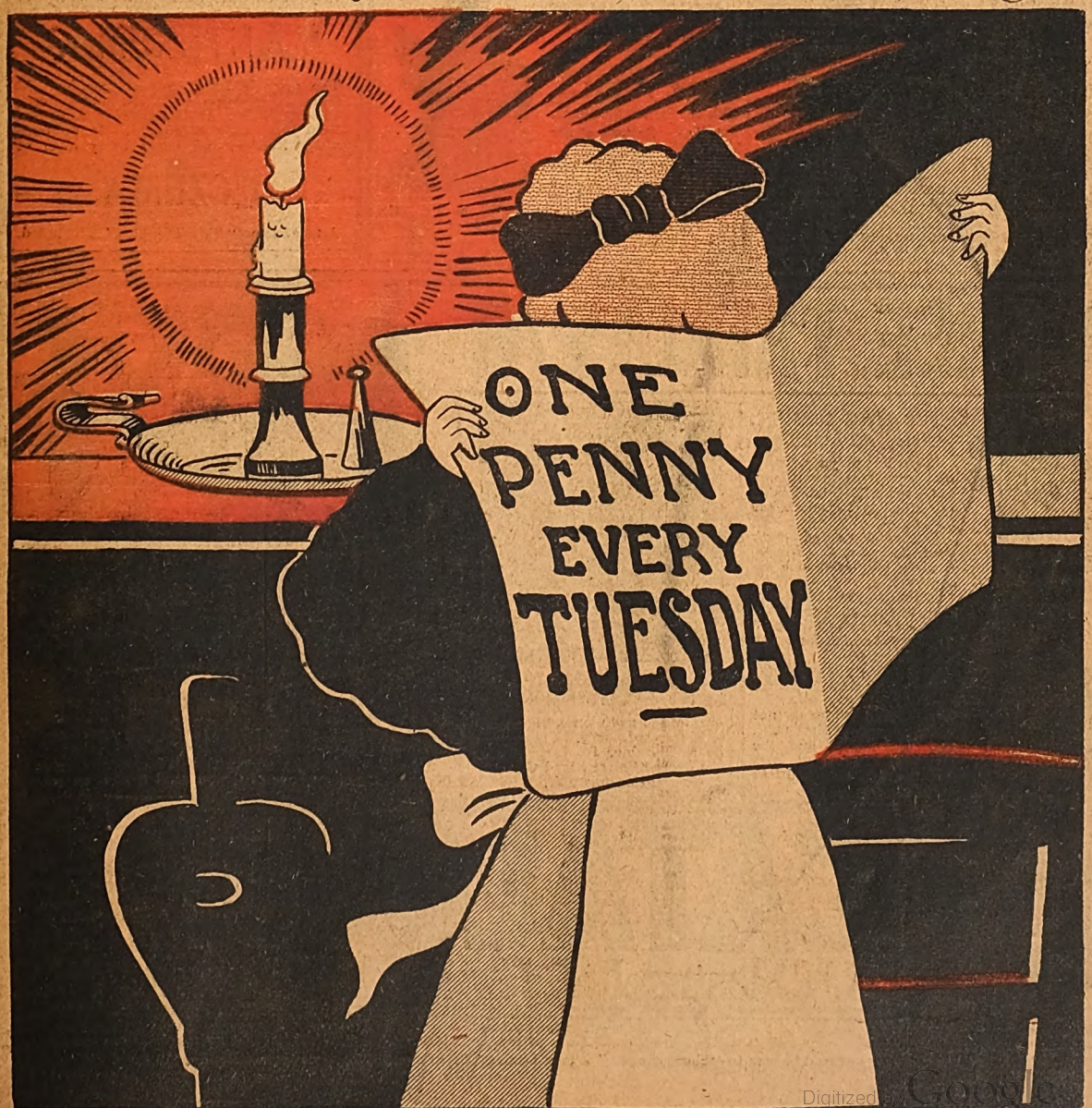

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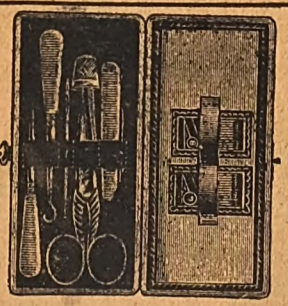

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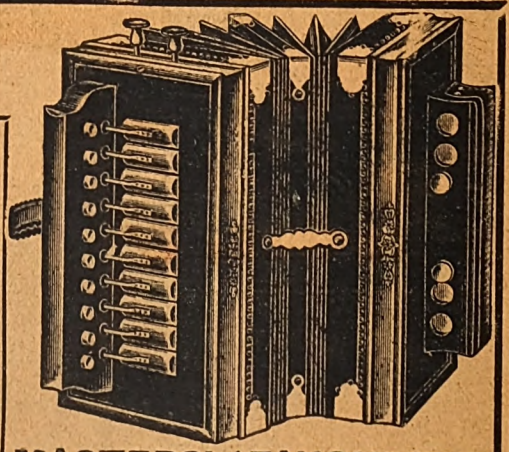

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 641.] For the Week Ending April 13th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

A Keeper of Secrets

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Being Days in the Professional Life of the late Mr. Hugo Pontifex, the Famous West-end Solicitor.

To those who had only met him casually in Society, the late Mr. Pontifex was a good-tempered mystery. Bluff, handsome, and, in spite of his middle-age, a little of a dandy, he seemed the last man in the world to deserve his reputation, which was that of the keenest, most audacious, and unerring of family lawyers. Fair-haired, and powerful as an athlete, his striking appearance was increased by his eyes, one of which was grey and one blue.

In reality, however, Hugo Pontifex had a wide and almost exclusively aristocratic practice. He seldom briefed a barrister, seldom set foot in a court of justice, but single handed he hunted down, captured, and safely buried mystery after mystery of terrible import to Mayfair and Belgravia.

An expert in strangling scandal, he lived a life of enthralling interest, and died a rich man. When his executors went through his papers they found nothing to satisfy their curiosity, though plenty to excite it. Hugo Pontifex knew the value of fire—and the dangers of ink. But from time to time he related to the writer, who enjoyed a certain measure of his confidence, the incidents which form the basis of the following stories. In speaking of these strange fragments of drama, Mr. Pontifex himself employed fictitious names, the present author being left to guess vainly at the identity of the genuine actors.

THE AFFAIR OF THE JAPANESE VALET.

For some time there lay upon the marble mantelpiece in Mr. Pontifex's private room, an elaborately-carved wooden pipe, with a long stem. About this pipe hung a faint and almost indescribable odour—an odour that was neither the scent of tobacco, nor of opium. Twisted loosely to the slender tube was a thin plait of something glossy and golden—a braid of human hair, obviously from a woman's head.

The series of events that brought these peculiar articles into the solicitor's possession began with the visit of Lieutenant Francis Howard, R.N., to Mr. Pontifex's offices in St. James' Street.

Francis Howard was an attractive young officer, with the cleanly-shaven jaw and strong, cheerful countenance so frequent in the Navy; Mr. Pontifex took a fancy to his visitor before the Lieutenant had concluded the first few sentences of an embarrassed explanation.

"I'm afraid you'll think rather badly of me," confessed the visitor, frankly, "but the fact is, I want you to corner a rival of mine. Not because he is a rival of mine, but because he's a consummate blackguard. At least, I believe that's my chief reason, though it is hard to be done out of a girl you've been engaged to for years."

The great lawyer smiled—he liked his client's candour.

"You have summarized the situation admirably," he said, "may I ask for particulars?"

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"The fellow's name," responded Francis Howard grimly, "is Percival Ross—at present he calls himself an explorer, and, to tell the truth, he has knocked about the world above a bit. I met him in Hong Kong, where he was understood to be a newspaper 'special.' He can be pleasant company enough, and I was sufficient of a fool to get intimate with him, and to introduce him to some of the best people in the colony."

He hesitated a moment, then shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Oh well," he pursued; "I suppose I had better admit I told Ross a good deal about myself and my folks, and—and about Linda—that is to say, Miss Brooke, the lady I had been spoons on since I was a middy. He has a way of picking your brains, has Ross, and he picked mine. A pretty use he made of the information I gave him, the hound."

Mr. Pontifex pushed a silver tray across the writing-table—it contained matches and an assortment of cigarettes.

"Thanks," muttered the lieutenant, and lighting one of the trifles, he puffed mournfully.

"At last," he said; "I detected Ross in what was nothing more or less than a low theft, and from one of my friends at that. I saw him, on a certain evening during my stay at Hong Kong, pocket a little jewelled idol—an incredibly valuable thing—part of a collection

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that was being shown us in a house to which I had obtained him an entry."

Francis Howard sighed and blew a cloud of fragrant smoke.

"What was I to do?" he added, "I was responsible for his being there, and a scandal isn't a pretty matter to have on one's hands on the China station. Wisely or unwisely, Mr. Pontifex, I temporized, and, as much for Ross' sake as my own, I kept silent at the moment. The same night I accused him privately. He collapsed instantly, gave me the idol back, told me, with tears, the whole miserable story of his life—a shady, poverty-stricken one it had been, as you may guess—and begged me to spare him. I agreed, on condition that he left Hong Kong forthwith, after signing a brief confession of his guilt and real character, to be published by me if he should venture to return or approach any of the persons to whom I had introduced him. The confession was drawn up and subscribed; Ross sailed for Australia inside a week. I smuggled the idol into its proper receptacle and flattered myself I had disentangled successfully rather an awkward knot."

The lieutenant brushed the ash from his cigarette. Mr. Pontifex noticed that the tanned fingers were quivering, as if with suppressed passion.

"That was two years since," concluded Francis Howard, drily; "I did not see Ross again until three days ago, when, on reaching England to spend a short furlough, I encountered him at the residence of the Brookes—a fellow guest, and unmistakably paying his court to my betrothed.

"Reaching London in the course of his wanderings, he had, I discovered, called on the Brookes, representing himself to be an intimate of mine, had been hospitably received, and had paid them, by then, half-a-dozen lengthy visits, improving, on each occassion, his acquaintance with Linda."

Mr. Pontifex nodded.

"I comprehend," he answered, "the wheel is come full circle. And now you want me to remind Mr. Ross of the confession which you possess, and to urge upon him the inadvisability of driving you to extremes."

The lieutenant coloured.

"Would to Heaven, Mr. Pontifex," he faltered, "I could authorise you to do exactly that. But Ross has been one too many for me already. I had a stormy interview with him on the day of my arrival at the Brookes', and told him, that, rather than pain them by publicly unmasking him, I was prepared to allow him to beat a graceful retreat. If he should refuse, I threatened to show them the confession, of which I gave him a warning glimpse."

"And that glimpse, presumably," remarked the solicitor, "lost you the precious document."

"I fear so," assented Francis Howard, repentantly, "at all events, it was in my keeping that afternoon and the sight of it forced Ross to promise complete obedience to my demands. The next morning he grinned in my face and recommended me to do my worst. Vaguely suspecting the reason for his change of front, I got out my letter-case, in which I had laid the paper on the preceding night. It was gone."

"Exactly!" said Mr. Pontifex, "and if you forgive my brutality, this Percival Ross would have been a fool had he allowed such a damning statement to remain in your charge. Of course he destroyed it immediately upon securing it, and with it, your direct hold over him."

"What puzzles me," declared the Lieutenant, "is this; how did the scoundrel abstract the sheet bearing his confession? I read it over carefully in my bedroom that very evening, after locking my door. Having satisfied myself that the paper would do what I wanted, I deposited it in my letter-case and went to bed. The following morning, as I have said, the confession was gone."

Mr. Pontifex tossed the end of his cigarette into the tray.

"I must have an opportunity of studying this purloiner of idols and documents," he intimated. "Can you arrange for me to pass a night under the roof of the Brookes?"

"I imagine so," said Francis Howard, "but what do you hope to achieve by that?"

The solicitor set a reproving palm on his client's knee.

"My dear sir," he retorted, "I never hope; I plan, and I accomplish. By the way, is Miss Brooke seriously enamoured of—of your rival?"

"I—I'm not sure," stammered the lieutenant, "I had scarcely mentioned his name when she turned on me like a dear little tigress, saying that she despised jealous men and that I might think what I chose about herself and Mr. Ross."

Mr. Pontifex bit his lip to disguise his mirth. "You have my respectful sympathy," he protested. "And now to business—for even if Miss Brooke proves inconstant we must save her from this designing rascal. What is the address of the Brookes?"

"They are staying at their place on the river, near Pangbourne," explained Francis Howard.

"Excellent," commented the lawyer, "I will run down late this evening, to see you—on imaginary and important business—and will miss my last train to town. They must needs offer to put me up. So get back to Pangbourne as quickly as you can; it is now"—Mr. Pontifex glanced at his gold hunter—"half-past two," he said, "expect me soon after eight o'clock. The last train to town is about nine-twenty, I shall lose that most convincingly."

"But what is your idea?" demanded the bewildered lieutenant.

"To bait a trap for Mr. Ross," rejoined the solicitor, "that will be easier to enter than to escape from. *Au revoir*, till—till half-past eight." And he dismissed his young client without more ado.

For the succeeding three or four hours Hugo Pontifex worked hard, with never a thought of the lieutenant and his love-affair. Yet at half-past eight precisely he was some forty miles from London, breathing the cool, Thames-side atmosphere, and admiring the dusky beauty of the August twilight as it gathered over the trees and lanes of Pangbourne. Mr. Pontifex was almost sorry when his fly deposited him at the door of a squat and rambling residence whose windows were just beginning to glow with the mellow radiance of its shaded lamps.

The device by which he proposed to obtain a night's lodging in this secluded recess of Berkshire was too simple not to prove effective. He whiled away some sixty minutes in a pretended legal consultation of vital urgency with the lieutenant—a consultation which he managed should be interrupted by the sudden chiming of the second quarter after nine.

Hugo Pontifex was an actor from both instinct and training, and his mock confusion, at the apparant discovery that he was confined to Pangbourne till the morning, might have deceived the shrewdest student of the human countenance.

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Tickled by the comedy, Francis Howard played his share in it with spirit, and appealed to his host and hostess, who, as the solicitor had foreseen assured Mr. Pontifex courteously that his misfortune was their gain.

So, with a skilful display of diffidence, the lawyer yielded, and was escorted to Mrs. Brooke's drawing-room—the secret goal of his diplomacy. Here, among other persons, he was made acquainted with Mr. Percival Ross and the capricious Miss Linda herself.

"How clever!" cried Linda Brooke. "Is it not, Mr. Ross?"

Percival Ross was a tall and sinewy Englishman, boasting a cold, fierce gaze and the moustache of a cowboy. As they exchanged a formal handclasp the solicitor analysed him rapidly.

"Resolute, selfish, unscrupulous," he murmured, "but deficient in daring. Too much of the pick-pocket, not sufficient of the gambler. You are mine, Mr. Ross!"

This verdict recorded, Mr. Pontifex turned his attention to Miss Linda Brooke. He saw in her an unusual type of blonde—graceful, animated, daintily pink-and-white, her eyes dark, her hair a gleaming golden yellow. She had risen from a settee, where she was playing indolently with a magnificent Persian cat, to bow to the lawyer—not ungraciously, Hugo Pontifex was a striking figure in any assembly—and had sunk again into her cushions. Percival Ross was leaning over the arm of the lounge, talking confidentially to the handsome mistress of the Persian.

Releasing himself adroitly from his host, the solicitor crossed the apartment, and sitting down by the lieutenant's sweetheart, began to chatter to her in his gayest vein. Ross scowled, but Mr. Pontifex ignored him blandly. Francis Howard had retired into a convenient alcove, to observe, at his leisure, the proceedings of his extraordinary ally.

Linda Brooke, Mr. Pontifex quickly perceived, was a coquette, but a coquette of merry and girlish impulses. A jesting compliment and a few scraps of the very freshest gossip enabled him to slip on to a footing of easy good-fellowship with the laughing beauty. He commenced to pet the splendid Persian, a trifling occupation, yet the lawyer had a motive in it.

"Your favourite has a fine head," he said casually, "do you know it is one of my hobbies to collect studies of cats? I sketch them quite passably myself, let me prove it to you."

He whipped out a pencil and several folios of blank paper, and hastily imitated the Persian's sleepy pose.

"How clever!" cried Linda Brooke, "is it not, Mr. Ross?"

Percival Ross surveyed it critically.

"Not half bad," he conceded, reluctantly.

"A cat's expression is more difficult to represent than that of a human being," answered Mr. Pontifex, amiably, "now I would guarantee to complete a portrait of Mr. Ross in half as many strokes."

His pencil flew over the paper.

"There!" he said, "no one who has ever met Mr. Ross, would fail to recognise that, I fancy. I should like to bet that if I were to circulate that sketch in any part of the world where Mr. Ross's adventurous journeys have carried him, his friends and enemies—in Valparaiso or—or in Hong-Kong—would cry out: 'That is Percival Ross.'"

Ross gnawed at his moustache.

"I see," he interrupted, "you know both my Christian name and my profession, Mr. Pontiface."

"Pontifex, my dear sir," corrected the solictor, stroking at the portrait, "yes, I have heard of you, Mr. Ross. Your Christian name and your profession, however, are common information, for the rest, you are quite an enigma. Are you not going to favour us with a biography, one of these days?"

"I believe not," growled the other, "I am eccentric in that respect, Mr. Pontifex—my eccentricity even extends to a prejudice against having my portrait taken.

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Perhaps, having demonstrated your powers, you will either give me your sketch or destroy it."

"That would be too terrible a sacrifice for an amateur artist such as I am," objected Mr. Pontifex, putting away the study of Percival Ross' countenance and presenting the picture of the Persian to Linda Brooke, with a gallant apology for its imperfections. This done he abandoned his position on the settee and moved towards Francis Howard. Percival Ross barred his path.

"I must insist, sir," he murmured, "on your destroying that sketch or delivering it to me." But the lawyer only smiled tolerantly, and evaded him by a swift manœuvre.

An ominous snarl distorted Percival Ross' features. Controlling himself determinedly, he regained the lounge and resumed, with Miss Linda Brooke, the conversation so abruptly suspended by the solicitor's artistic propensities.

"What on earth was your object in all that?" whispered Francis Howard as Hugo Pontifex reached the alcove whence his client had been able to overhear the whole of the recent proceedings.

"To bait my trap for your rival," said Mr. Pontifex, in a low voice; "look at the portrait—it is Ross himself. I did not exaggerate when I suggested that it could be identified as Percival Ross by any of his friends, or enemies."

Francis Howard was listening mechanically, his gaze had fixed upon his unconscious neighbours, Linda and Percival Ross.

Screened by a high cabinet and the back of the settee, the mischievous blonde was flirting audaciously.

"You cannot be the only person," argued the solicitor, "who knows him for what he is. He already suspects me and, as I intended, realises the danger of leaving that portrait in my hands. Therefore he will try to get it out of me before I go. He has only to-night for his attempt, which should initiate us into the method by which he deprived you of his confession. What is the matter?" he broke off to ask.

The lieutenant had staggered and gripped at a sweeping curtain for support. Mr. Pontifex glanced over his client's shoulder and perceived that Linda Brooke was archly dangling before the eyes of her companion a golden skein, rippling and elastic. Percival Ross snatched at it and thrust it into his vest-pocket.

The girl rose, with a frown of assumed indignation, and, fluttering her fan of feathers, moved away laughing.

"Curse him," muttered Francis Howard; "you saw that, Pontifex—it is a braid of her hair. I have such another and she gave it me in the same fashion. Oh, Linda, Linda!"

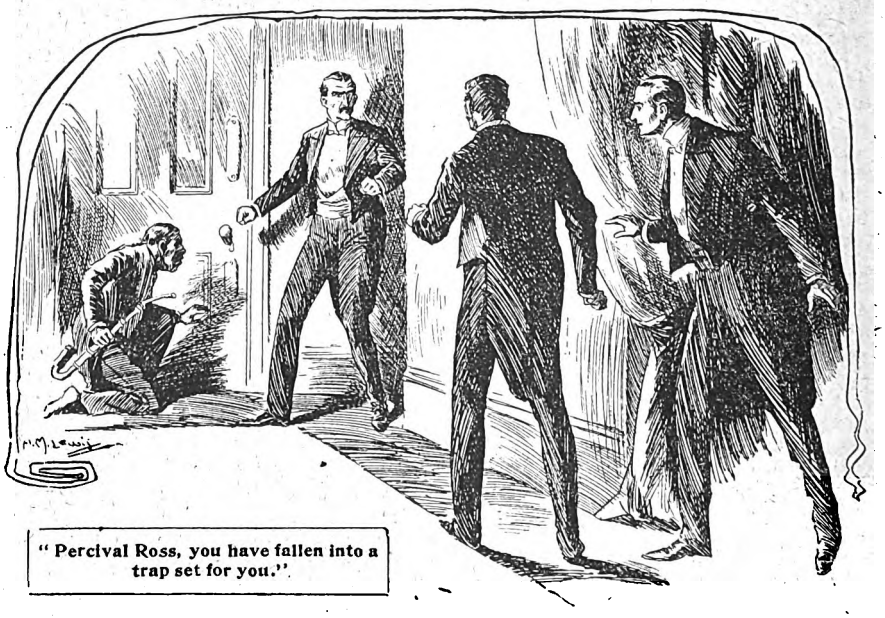
The lieutenant flung himself down in the padded alcove and groaned. Mr. Pontifex regarded him pityingly and strolled out into the drawing-room.

The clock in the hall was striking midnight when the lawyer next spoke to his client. The various members of the house-party were beginning to retire, and Mr. Pontifex had waylaid the young naval officer at the door of the latter's bedchamber.

"Come to my room, unseen, as soon as you can," he instructed softly, "the door at the further end of the passage. It is time to set the trap; Ross went off, ostensibly to turn in, ten minutes ago. Who the dickens is that?"

A short man, spare, stealthy, and brown-skinned, had just gone by along the corridor.

"Ross' valet," said the lieutenant, "a Japanese, and as ugly as his master."



"Percival Ross, you have fallen into a trap set for you."

Hugo Pontifex stepped hurriedly into the speaker's apartment.

"Why didn't you tell me your rival had a Japanese attendant?" he inquired irritably.

"It didn't occur to me," replied Francis Howard, "is it of any significance?"

The lawyer started suddenly, his keen nostrils dilated and he breathed deeply. An instant he stood, absorbed by reflection, then spun on his heel.

"Don't come to my room after all," he ordered, "I will rejoin you here as quickly as possible."

His client stared. "Very well," he said, "you are my superior officer in this business."

Mr. Pontifex put a finger on his lip, and, with an unnecessarily distinct "Good-night," left the chamber. He was positive that almost inaudible footsteps tracked him to his door. Stooping to fumble with the knob, he caught a glimpse of the Japanese disappearing round a shady angle close by. The solicitor waited for five minutes before pushing off his shoes and stealing forth again.

Locking the door on the outside, he took the key and tip-toed down the now darkened passage. He attained

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Francis Howard's apartment unobserved, and lowering the light, imposed absolute silence upon the lieutenant.

Half-an-hour elapsed, and then, some slight and evidently anticipated sound striking upon Mr. Pontifex's vigilant ear, he motioned to his client and together they crept along the corridor through the slumbering mansion.

Within sight of the entrance to his chamber, the lawyer touched the lieutenant's arm and they halted. Hidden by the angle in the passage, and aided by the dim illumination of a solitary gas-bracket, they could see that the Japanese valet was kneeling beside the door. Near him stood Percival Ross.

The Japanese was performing a curious process. Occassionally sucking at a wooden pipe he blew the inhaled fumes into Mr. Pontifex's apartment, by applying his lips tightly to a panel at a point, where, the solicitor surmised, a hole had been bored.

"That is the way in which you were hocussed," said Hugo Pontifex, noiselessly, to Francis Howard; "it is an Oriental trick—the Jap is smoking Indian hemp, 'bhang' as he would call the drug. The smoke is strongly narcotic; you must have slept soundly while Ross was calmly pilfering the confession from your letter-case. If our host's bachelor rooms were not small enough, though, to fill with the fumes, the trick would have proved impossible. I spotted the dodge immediately I sniffed the air of yours (which the odour still taints) and altered my scheme a trifle. Be on your guard—they're bound to get a surprise when they find the key missing from the inside of the lock. They will be reckoning on twisting the butt-end with a pair of forceps."

He was right. Percival Ross was holding the tool in question, ready to operate upon the fastening of the door when it should be thought prudent. The Japanese relinquished his crouching attitude and his master bent down. "The deuce!" he hissed; "the key isn't in the lock."

Mr. Pontifex sprang clear of the bend in the corridor. "Naturally!" he announced, "since it is in my possession. Percival Ross, you have fallen into a trap set for you."

The man addressed made a ferocious gesture. Hugo Pontifex flashed out a silver whistle and lifted it to his mouth. "A single act of violence," he said, "and we rouse the house. Your game is played to the finish, Ross; for Miss Brooke's sake we will deal more leniently with you than you deserve."

Giving the whistle to the lieutenant, he showed the baffled "explorer" a fountain-pen and a sheet torn from his note-book. During the enforced pause in his bed-room, the lawyer had had the forethought to write these lines:

> I, Percival Ross, confess hereby that I am—and have been for years—a thief and a blackguard, and that my presence in this house is an insult to it. I, therefore, agree to leave England at once, on the undertaking of Mr. H. Pontifex, solicitor, that my true character shall be revealed to no other person than Miss Brooke.

"Sign that," commanded Mr. Pontifex.

Percival Ross clutched at the pen, and, with a frightful oath, obeyed.

"You have a specimen of Miss Brooke's hair," remarked the laywer; "I will confiscate it, if you please."

His victim fumed, but the solicitor was inflexible; he received the gleaming skein and put it away with the signed page from his note book.

"To-morrow," he said, "you will bid farewell to Pangbourne—you can travel to town with me. That is all, for the present."

The "explorer" and his brown henchman were slinking past, when Mr. Pontifex's eye lighted upon the carved pipe in the fingers of the Japanese.

"Stay," he added, "I will appropriate that little contrivance. It is only fair that robbers should be robbed."

He wrested the instrument from the sullen grasp of the Japanese and motioned him to follow his discomfited employer.

* * * * *

And that is why there lies upon the mantelpiece of Mr. Pontifex's office in St. James' Street a carved wooden pipe and a tress of shining golden hair.

The confession which was signed by Percival Ross did not long remain in the keeping of Lieutenant Howard. He offered chivalrously to burn it on the eventful occasion when, after the "explorer's" departure, he showed it to Miss Linda Brooke. She replied by weeping pathetically, and begging him to preserve it until he could assure her of his forgiveness. Whereat the lieutenant pulled out his matchbox and consumed the document in a twinkling. Linda smiled through her tears, a much relieved young lady.

Upon the lieutenant calling one day, some while after, to settle accounts with Mr. Pontifex, the lawyer offered his client a golden tress. Francis Howard shook his head. "She did not cut it for me," he said, sadly. And he went away without telling Mr. Pontifex, what that gentleman had just read in the Morning Post, that he was to be married in a month—to Miss Linda herself.

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Cupid in California

By OLIVER STRANGE.

It must have been a touch of sardonic humour which prompted the first settlers in their choice of a title, for so far as Nature was concerned, it would have been hard to find a prettier spot in all California, than little Hades.

Perhaps a premonition of the class of men likely to flock there, when the wealth of the surrounding rocks became known, had something to do with the christening of the settlement.

Little Hades had existed as a town—so-called—for some twelve months when the events about to be related occured, and was not yet civilized, the citizens being, in the words of one of them, "a mighty tough lot."

For this reason, although they themselves commonly substituted a literal translation when alluding to the settlement by name, it was scarcely healthy for a stranger to so presume.

The town itself, consisting for the most part of log shanties, with one or two low brick buildings the most prominent of which was the saloon, occupied the bottom of a gulch, which resembled a huge gash, as though a great red slice had been cut out of the pine-clothed hills.

The one street—dignified by the name—ran straight through the valley, and climbing up, became a mere trail which lost itself in the pines above.

It was at the top of this trail, in the full heat of the afternoon sun, that Miss Angelica Webber paused for breath, before plunging into the cool shadow of the woods.

Ange, as she was familiarly known, was the only child of Old Webber, who kept the saloon before referred to. She was barely eighteen years of age, but her tall figure, handsome face, and lithe step, had already caused considerable trouble among the unmarried section of the community.

"Now I wonder which way those two silly men have gone," she murmured thoughtfully, peering into the recesses of the woods. "I reckon they've come up here to quarrel, and perhaps——" the accent on the word betrayed but little doubt—"it's about me."

Her irresolution was but momentary, and gathering up her short skirts she slid noiselessly into the bushes. After proceeding for about thirty yards, the indistinct murmur of voices reached her from a neighbouring clump of brush. With catlike caution she stole forward over the sound-deadening pine needles, and peeped through. Then she smiled, and slightly blushing, settled herself to listen.

Two men were seated in a little clearing, facing each other. Both were young, and dressed much alike in the rough garments of the diggings. In height and build there was little to choose between them; their hair was similar in colour, but here the resemblance ceased, for one had a clean-shaven, almost plain face, which contrasted strangely with the moustached, handsome, but somewhat dissipated features of the other. The former was Matthew Flynn, and his companion was Richard Hammond, his partner. The first named was speaking when the young girl arrived.

"You see, Dick, it's like this," he was saying. "We've been partners for about five years, and though your ideas as to amusement ain't always mine, we've stuck together."

"That's so," was the reply.

"We've been in some rough places, and had some tightish times, but we've pulled through, and never had a serious difference."

"That's so," repeated Dick, reaching out his hand. His partner grasped it, and continued:

"And then we came to this camp, and strike it pretty rich, and—and—there's a girl."

This time the other only nodded.

"They do say down there," waving a hand towards the gully, "that it lays between us. Now being partners, we can't fight, and——" he stopped helplessly.

Dick laughed lightheartedly at his friend's earnest simplicity.

"I guess we'd better play for first innings, old man," he said, "the loser to keep out of the way until the winner gets his answer."

His tone implied little anxiety as to the result, whether chance favoured him or not, and as he spoke he drew a box and dice from his pocket, articles he was never without

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Mat took the—to him—unfamiliar implement, and rattled the dice thoughtfully.

"Sudden death," said Dick, and Mat threw—seven.

"A poor throw, partner," said his opponent, as, with practised hand, he tilted out the cubes and disclosed sixes.

For some moments Mat gazed silently at the dice, and then he stretched out his hand to the winner, and said:

"Good luck to you, Dick."

The other pressed the hand cordially, and, rising, said laconically:

"Coming down?"

"I reckon I'll stay up here a bit longer," replied Mat, keeping his eyes on the ground.

Dick understood, and went without another word.

"Poor old Mat," he muttered as he climbed down the trail. "He doesn't realise that he has no more chance with the girl, than he had with the dice, against me."

In this self-satisfied reflection he was not altogether right, however, for the man he had left was even at that moment aimlessly tearing up the long grass, and trying to stifle the same thought.

As for the unseen listener, the cause of this singular meeting, she waited until Dick's footsteps had died away, and then a mischievous idea took possession of her mind. She crept back some distance, and then again advanced, purposely making as much noise as possible. As she pushed aside the bushes, and stepped into the clearing, she started back with a little cry of astonishment, well enough done to have deceived a keener wit than a lover's.

At the sight of her Mat rose awkwardly, and the young girl, with a merry smile, bent him a sweeping curtsey.

"Ah! Mr. Flynn," she said, "so I have discovered your secret at last. I know now why we so rarely see you at the saloon."

Mat started, blushed red under the deep bronze of his face, and stammered: "But Ange—I mean Miss Webber—I—I haven't any secret."

The girl looked at him with a quizzical expression, and he tried hard to think. Then she nodded her head very knowingly, and very prettily, to his mind.

"You're a poet, that's what you are," she said slowly.

Mat breathed again, and endeavouring to look consciously shame-faced, said: "Well, you won't give me away, will you?"

"Either it's that, or you're in love," continued his tormentor.

He tried to laugh but made poor work of it, and he stood clumsily fingering his hat like a big schoolboy detected of a fault. Ange watched him curiously for a moment, and then said:

"Well, I must go. If anyone came along they might take us for lovers, only——"

"Only," repeated Mat.

"They would think we were quarrelling," she retorted, as with a mocking laugh she vanished among the trees.

Mat made as though he would follow but stopped short, as the memory of his late compact with Dick crossed his mind.

"It wouldn't be fair to him," he muttered, and flung himself down on the ground again.

As he did so, a voice from the incircling foliage said sweetly:

"Pray don't trouble. I can find my way home alone, even if I don't meet Dick—I mean Mr. Hammond."

The words brought him to his feet again, but only just in time to see a gleam of white flutter through a distant opening in the woods.

"She called him Dick," he said slowly, as he turned in the direction of the trail.

When he reached the settlement, he found it in a state of expectant excitement, and he noticed that one or two of the miners regarded him in a curious manner.

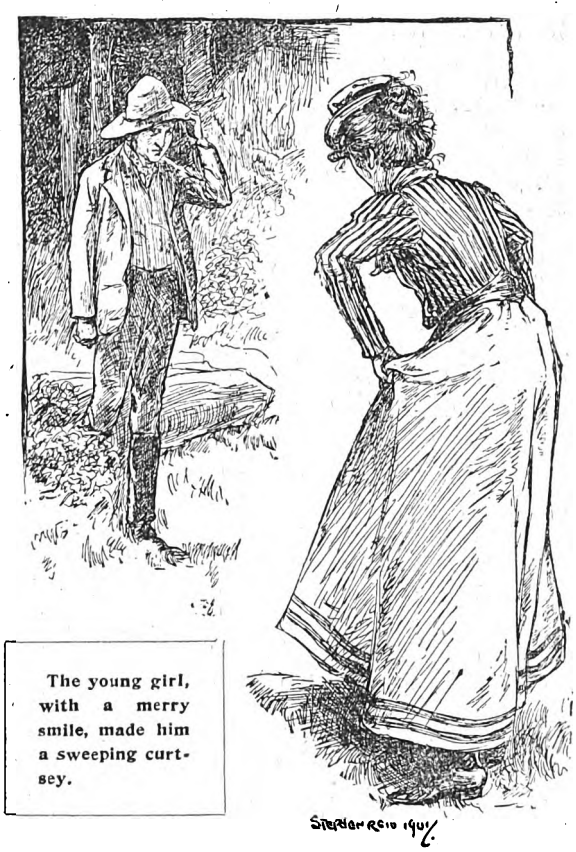
There were a crowd of loungers outside the saloon, and of one of these he made inquiries.

"Vigilants have nailed a thief, and they're tryin' him," was the reply.

"Who is he, a stranger?" Mat asked indifferently.

"Not much, an' look here, you ain't a particular pal of mine, but if I was you, I'd get out."

Seeing the look of amazement on the face of his questioner, he continued:



The young girl, with a merry smile, made him a sweeping curtsey.

"There ain't a chance for him. He was seen to hide some 'stuff' up in the woods a week ago, ready to clear out one night, I reckon, but he's been watched, and this time they caught him in the very act of lifting 'dust' from Denver's shanty, an' he's booked, certain."

"But what has this to do with me?" Mat asked, impatiently.

The other shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly as he replied:

"Nothin', only the thief is your partner."

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For a moment Mat glared at the speaker, clenching his hand as though about to strike him to the earth. Then, as the too probable truth of the accusation came home to him, he groaned and staggered away. His informant watched him go, muttering:

"He seems quite surprised. Funny that a man's partner should know less about him than anyone else in the settlement."

The trial did not last long, for in this instance, at least, it was but a formality. The accused recognised it as such, and even tried to shorten the proceedings by ocularly announcing his guilt. At length it was over, and the expectant crowd was informed that the hanging would take place early on the following morning, so as not to interfere with the day's work. Little attentions like this cost nothing and make the members of the committee popular.

As soon as it was dark, a man presented himself before the massive log hut which did duty as a gaol, and, after a short colloquy with the armed sentinel at the door, was admitted.

The noise aroused the condemned man, and he rose with a smile to welcome his visitor, whose identity was revealed by a lantern hung in one corner of the shed.

"Mat, old man, this is good."

"Hush!" was the reply. "I've got permission to see you, but time is short. You must change clothes with me, and get out of this."

Dick hesitated a moment, and then said: "But they'll hang you, Mat."

"Dry up!" responded Mat roughly. "I reckon I know what I am doing, and you've got to do as I say, for—her sake. She loves you, and besides, a bargain's a bargain."

The inherent selfishness of Dick's nature, made him give in easily. Silently they effected a change of apparel, and then with a pair of scissors, Mat clipped away the prisoner's moustache.

"Pull your hat down, and hang your head as though you're a good deal cut up, and I reckon you'll pass," he said. "Both horses are ready at the back of the cabin, and there is money in the saddlebags. Try and get her to go with you."

Dick nodded, and with a last handshake, slid through the door and vanished into the darkness. Mat, listening, heard him utter something to the sentinel, and then came silence.

With a sigh of relief, he threw himself down on the rough ground, and lay there thinking. To-morrow morning he would have to take his friend's place under the fatal tree, for he knew that in the eyes of Judge Lynch, his crime was even worse than that of the man he had saved. Thoughts of escape came to him, but he knew that half-a-dozen armed men lay sleeping within a few yards of the gaol.

He was aroused from his reverie by the sound of a low sweet voice outside:

"Now Jake, you will let me speak to him, won't you. You see, the poor fellow's fond of me, and I guess he'd like to wish me goodbye. I—I'll give you a—a kiss—just to let me go in for a few minutes."

Mat's face flushed, for he recognised the voice.

"She can't have seen him," he muttered. "Thinks he's still here."

There was a short scuffle, a little laugh, and the next moment the door opened and closed. Almost instinctively Mat had blown out his light, so that although his form was visible, his features were sufficiently blotted out. Without a word the girl stepped up to him, and throwing off a long heavy cloak, whipped it over his shoulders. Then she snatched off his hat, and replaced it by the light fleecy shawl from her own dainty head.

"You're taller than me, but if you bend your knees a little, I think you can fool Jake. If he tries any more foolishness," he could not see her blushes, "stun him with this," and she slipped a heavy revolver into his hand.

"Well, go ahead and hang me, only," and she smiled, "Dad won't use the 'chalk' as freely as I do."

"But you?" he whispered.

"I'll stay here," was the reply. "You don't reckon they'll hang me, do you? Now go at once, and don't forget you are a woman."

She pushed him towards the door, and he caught her hand, but as he stooped to kiss it, he felt a pair of warm, moist, lips on his cheek. He went out, and managed to elude the sentinel, in consequence of that worthy having to make fast the door, before indulging in "foolishness."

* * * * *

Early on the following morning, the sun shone down on a curious scene. The entire population, except the feminine portion, were congregated around the gaol, gazing with mixed feelings and expressions, at the slight girlish form, leaning in the doorway. Near-by stood,

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with ashamed face, the late sentinel, in the grasp of two stalwart miners. But for Ange, matters would probably have gone hard with this unlucky victim of her charms.

"I did it alone," she declared, facing them defiantly. "As for him, most of you would have been only too glad to have done what he did, for—for—me."

This was true enough, and many of the younger faces, albeit with grim smiles, looked enviously at the culprit. The girl saw her advantage.

"You've come here to hang," she said. "Well, go ahead, and hang me, only," and she smiled, "dad won't use the 'chalk' as freely as I do."

The overwhelming absurdity of the suggestion, together with the girl's humorous allusion to certain long-standing accounts at the saloon, turned the scale.

Amidst a roar of merriment, Jake was liberated, and the men who had come to kill, remained to laugh.

For the next few days, Mat was distinctly miserable. More certain than ever that Ange loved his partner, he conscientiously avoided her.

He concluded that the fugitive must have missed her on the night of the escape, and would send to her.

One evening, sitting moodily in his cabin, he heard a light step in the door, and looked up to find the subject of his thoughts standing before him.

"Good evening, Mr. Flynn. I've come for the cloak, if you've quite done with it," she said, calmly.

"The cloak?" stammered Mat.

"And there's a shawl, too," she added.

Then an idea came to the bewildered man's assistance.

Of course she would presume that Dick, on escaping, would come to the cabin, and leave the articles there for her.

"I've been very stupid," he said apologetically. "Of course Dick left the things and asked me to give them to you."

She took them, and stepped to the door, which she opened.

"He left them for me, you say?" she queried, with a tremulcus little smile.

Mat could only trust himself to nod assent.

"But Dick never had them," she cried and fled.

In a moment Mat was out of the cabin, and by her side, for encumbered with the heavy cloak, she could not run fast, even if she had wished to, which may be doubted.

"Ange! Ange!" he cried. "You knew—you knew—all the time that——" and catching her in his arms, he pressed his lips on the downcast head. Then he remembered his compact with the absent.

"But Dick," he murmured, half-releasing her.

"He had his answer the night he escaped," she whispered softly.

"Poor Dick," Mat said. "He has lost more by his misdeeds than he dreamt of."

Then as he looked down, her eyes answered his unspoken question, and he knew that he was wrong, for a man cannot lose what he has never possessed.

"Fine morning, Donald. What's the day going to be?"

"Weel, I'm thinkin' it'll maybe rain."

"But the barometer is rising, Donald."

"Yes; but it 's very little heed the weather hereabouts ays to the barometer."

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The Zulu War of 1879.

THE exact causes which led to the Zulu War of 1879 are not easily explained.

The proximity of Natal to Zululand, the steps taken by Sir Bartle Frere to save the Transvaal from being overrun by the Zulus, and the award by certain land commissioners on a disputed land claim between the Zulu and the Boer were the main causes.

The question becomes rather more obscure when we consider the relation existing between the two countries when war broke out.

Our position was undoubtedly one of supremacy, for so far back as 1861 we publicly fixed the accession to the Zulu throne.

In 1873 we again nominated the king, taking from him on his accession a declaration that he would rule in all righteousness, that he would not kill his people unjustly, and that no one should be put to death till he had received a fair trial.

One thing is certain, that we shirked our responsibilities. Ever since 1865 the Zulus had asked us to act as arbitrators in a dispute over the Amaswazi country which both nations claimed.

In the interest of peace, if nothing else, we ought to have accepted the responsibility.

Why did we not do so? Because South Africa at that time was regarded by the Colonial Office as an unmitigated nuisance.

So we did nothing, which of course prompted the Dutch to proclaim their sovereignty over the disputed territory and tax the inhabitants.

Here again we blundered. When Cetewayo, at our request, refrained from attacking the Boers who had seized a large district to the north of the Lydenburg gold fields, we were in a position, as the Boers were in the last stage of bankruptcy, to force them to surrender the territory, to which, it may be observed, they had not the slightest claim.

When we annexed the Transvaal in 1877 by a kind of political necessity, we had, in a measure, to adopt so much of its selfish and ill-omened policy that arbitration was no longer open to us.

Add to this the cry which arose in South Africa that the Zulus, on account of their formidable military organization, ought to be disarmed, and it can easily be seen what a dangerous crisis was at hand.

The outlook grew worse when Cetewayo, who had enacted a law declaring that all maidens who refused to marry his soldiers should be killed, furiously replied to our remonstrances that "he should govern the country as he pleased." To avert a rupture we then decided to proceed with the arbitration. Its terms proved, save one or two minor points, to be very acceptable to the Zulus, but when they learnt that its acceptance carried with it a proviso that they must disband their army of 60,000 men their rage knew no bounds. Cetewayo, even had he been peaceably inclined, dared not agree to our demands, for there was a warlike feeling amongst his young men who since his accession had not "washed their spears."

"Go back and tell the white man this," said the Zulu monarch to the messenger from the Natal government, "that the Governor of Natal and I are equal. He is Governor of Natal and I am Governor here."

Our annexation of the Transvaal, too, had sorely per-

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plexed the Zulu monarch. "The Boers are liars and thieves," he declared. "What does the Good White Queen want with such people?"

Sir Bartle Frere, one of the greatest of our Empire-builders, seeing how close we were to war, applied for troops. Again the Colonial Office blundered. They might have assembled in Natal such an imposing array of troops that the Zulus, seeing the futility of resistance, might have backed down. Instead, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, who was Colonial Minister at the time, wrote, "Her Majesty's Ministers are not prepared to comply with the request for reinforcements."

The Cabinet must have got wind of the foolishness of Sir Michael, for in November, 1878, they wrote that reinforcements would be sent.

Before these could reach Natal, the thirty days' grace we had given the Zulu king to disarm having expired, all further negotiations were intrusted to Lord Chelmsford, the Commander-in-Chief in South Africa.

War was begun on February, 1879, by our troops crossing the frontier, the enemy everywhere retreating. The only two practical roads into Zululand from Natal were Rorke's Drift and the Lower Tugela.

The reports as to the attitude of the Zulus were so conflicting that after our forces entered Rorke's Drift on February 11th, it was not known whether we should meet a hostile army or a submissive king.

But we were soon to be enlightened. On the 12th, we had a successful fight with the enemy, and burnt the kraal of Strayo. On 21st we encamped at Isandhlana.

In the meantime a body of troops under Colonel Durnford had crossed the Tugela Drift and marched up the left bank of the river to Rorke's Drift.

The next operation was to reconnoitre the country in the neighbourhood of Matyana's stronghold; Major Dartnoll, who was dispatched on this errand, sent word back that the country was strongly occupied by the enemy, and asked for reinforcements. None were sent.

On the 22nd, the major sent another dispatch saying that the enemy were in enormous force. On this Lord Chelmsford sent all the troops at his disposal (which, it should not be forgotten, might have been sufficient to have wiped the Zulus out there and then, had the affairs at the Colonial Office been administered with intelligence) and ordered Colonel Durnford to bring up his native troops from Rorke's Drift to reinforce and defend the camp during his absence with Dartnoll. The moment his lordship reached the front he decided, in the belief that the enemy confronting him were the main body, to attack.

The effort to dislodge them proved entirely successful, and after a sharp encounter the savages retired. We were in hot pursuit when a messenger rode up with the alarming report that firing could be heard to the left of the enemy.

But as nothing unusual could be detected in the camp from a neighbouring hill, Lord Chelmsford was about proceeding when Commandant Lonsdale arrived with the news that the camp was in the hands of the foe.

In other words, as soon as a small body of Zulus had lured the British general to a convenient distance, the main body had swooped down on our camp.

Although the day was far advanced Lord Chelmsford at once gave orders to return. It was night when they arrived, and the men were so worn out, for they had marched thirty miles that day, that finding the camp empty they crept in.

On every side they found traces of a terrible conflict. What did these men who were without ammunition do? Throw up intrenchments? No! They prowled about turning over the bodies of dead companions in search of food.

Think of it. British soldiers reduced to such straits as this. Soldiers after fasting for forty-eight hours have only one thought, food.

What a night for these poor fellows! What a night for Lord Chelmsford! He had lost all his tents, ammunition, and stores, and he could form no idea as to the enemy's plan.

Suddenly it struck him that the Zulus had invaded Natal. At an early hour the force started for Rorke's Drift.

This post was held by Lieutenant Chard and Lieutenant Bromhead, after the departure of Colonel Durnford with eighty men of the 24th Regiment.

Fortunately, Chard heard from some of the fugitives who had escaped the disaster which had befallen the camp at Isandhlana. While the little force was hard at work throwing up intrenchments the survivors told their sad story.

On the morning of the 22nd the main Zulu army, some 25,000 strong, was about five miles from the camp. It did not intend to fight that day for the "moon was dead," but it quietly surrounded the camp, sitting in full battle array.

A party of our men sent out to reconnoitre came into contact with the enemy, and fired at them. In an instant the dead moon was forgotten. The two horns, composed of unmarried regiments, rushed, with all the impetuosity of youth, to the attack, and were at once repulsed, but the centre, composed of married men, moved steadily on till they outflanked the British position.

It is impossible to conceive anything more perfect than the outflanking tactics of the Zulus. They taught them to the Boers, who in turn used them successfully against us, till, mastering the secret, we adopted them ourselves. Colonel Durnford, taking the flanking movement to be a retreat, ordered Colonel Pulleine to send his men to meet them. The latter officer, mistrusting the movements of the Zulus, suggested that he should keep his men in reserve in case Durnford's men wanted assistance.

What followed is not rightly known. That Colonel Durnford attacked the Zulus and that he was overcome is certain, but all the rest is mere conjecture. It is probable that on discovering his mistake he tried to regain the camp. One survivor speaks of the Zulus breaking through the ranks, another of an indiscriminate flight through the tents.

The assegais played a deadly part, killing our soldiers as they fled. We hear of our men forming themselves into squares and little groups and resisting desperately till their ammunition failed, and of others who were overwhelmed by repeated charges and showers of assegais. Something has been said of a wounded officer who from a waggon kept scores of Zulus at bay. But we hear of no Britisher, we are glad to say, who begged for mercy.

By the time the Zulus reached Rorke's Drift the little band was prepared to give them a warm reception. The defences were weak, for they had to be improvised. About barricades of flour and biscuit tins there is a most unsubstantial ring. But there were brave Britishers behind these frail defences prepared to fight to the last gasp. By sheer weight of numbers the Zulus managed to get inside the defences, but each time

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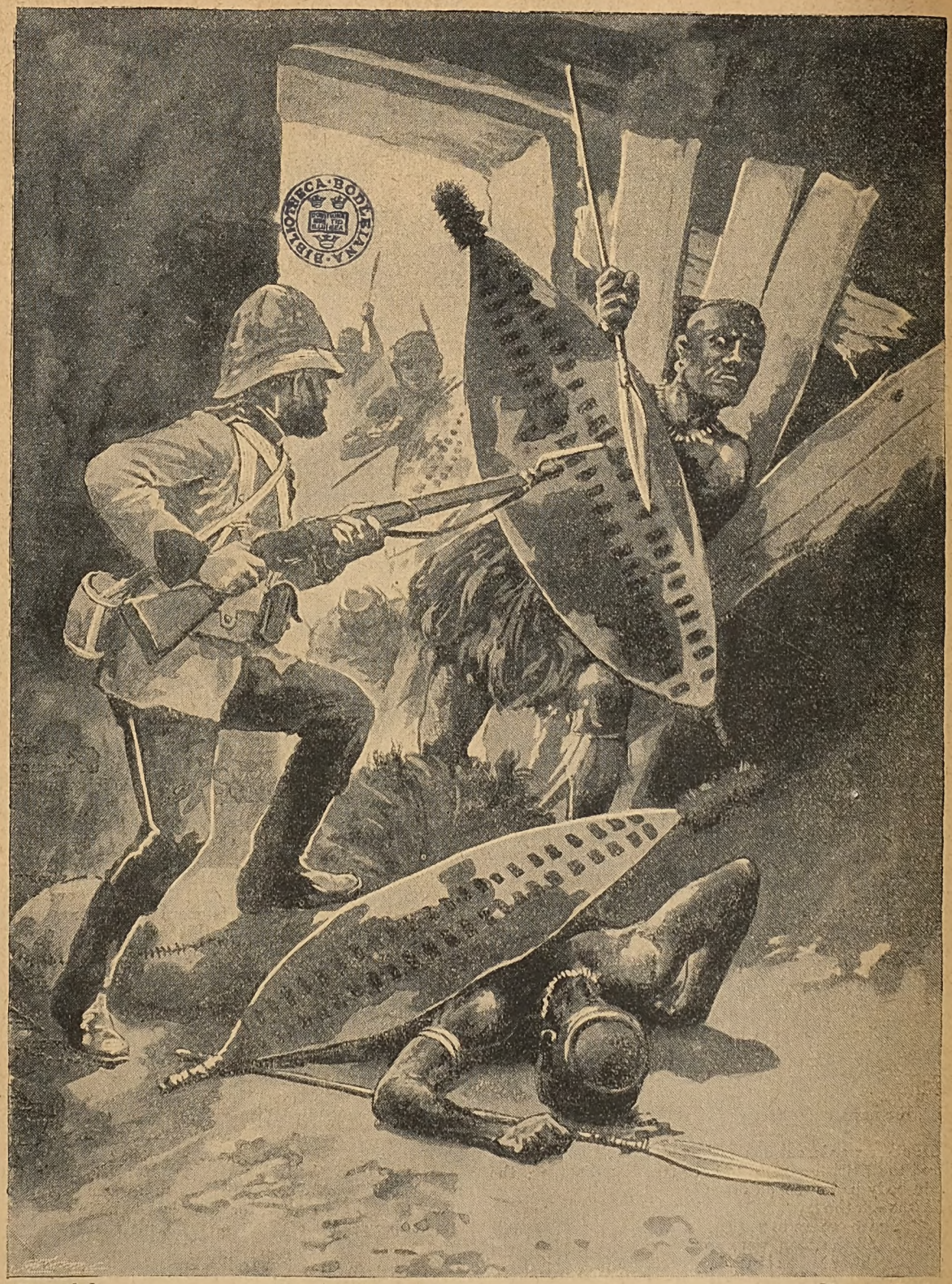

Drawn by] [*Lawson Wood.*

Hook and his rifle kept them at bay.

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they were driven out with the most surprising speed at the bayonet's point.

Of all the heroes who distinguished themselves that day Sergeant Hook, V.C., claims our admiration. How many Zulus this brave fellow killed is not actually known. Certainly over twenty, probably thirty. He was making tea for the wounded in the hospital when the alarm was given. Hastily distributing a quantity of cartridges about his person, Hook seized his Martini-Henry, and, adjusting his bayonet, fired on the advancing Zulus through the loopholes in the walls till they reached the hospital, the door of which they broke in. But they did not enter. Hook and his rifle kept them at bay. Those who faced the dauntless man were either shot or bayoneted. Hour after hour passed, and Hook, though wounded, went on calmly killing all who came within reach of his weapon. "If they had once got inside they would have killed all the invalids," said Hook to his officer subsequently, "so I was obliged to keep them out." And he did, till, repulsed on all sides, the Zulus lost heart and disappeared.

The little garrison had hardly ceased cheering when a large force was seen approaching; a thrill of apprehension passed through the troops. Another host of Zulus? No; they were Lord Chelmsford's tired men.

The news of the disaster at Isandhlana created the greatest consternation. Lord Chelmsford was, of course, greatly blamed. It was said he should have instructed Colonel Durnford to laager his wagons when night fell, and have pushed out scouts to prevent a surprise. The camp, too, was pitched on a site absolutely indefensible.

All this may be true, but the one great blot of the war was that it was not fought by mounted infantry.

Had cavalry been engaged Isandhlana would not have passed into the domain of British defeats.

On the day Isandhlana was fought, Colonel Pearson and a small force had engaged 5,000 Zulus ten miles south of Ekowe. Thanks to the Gatling guns, but still more to the superb bravery of the Naval Brigade, we carried the enemy's position and drove them north in the greatest disorder.

Natal, although alarmed for its safety, took every precaution to defeat a Zulu invasion. Volunteers were posted along the Tugela. Troops from Ceylon, and marines from St. Helena were stationed at Durban, Maritzburg, and Ladysmith.

Whether the Zulus were waiting for the full moon to gather in the mealie harvest, or for the Tugela floods to subside, before advancing is not known. Had they crossed the Tugela, nothing could have saved Natal. As they elected to remain quiet the spirits of the colonists began to revive.

The Zulus did not even attack Ekowe, though they were known to be assembled round it in great numbers.

Whilst attention was concentrated on Ekowe, and people were marvelling at the wonders of the heliograph communication, which had just been established, another disaster befel our arms.

A convoy on the road to Luneburg from Derby had halted at the Bombi river to meet a detachment of the 80th regiment, which had been sent for its protection. During the early hours of March 12th, 4,000 Zulus, taking advantage of a dense fog, stole unseen through the long grass in the neighbourhood of the river and creeping noiselessly into the camp slew all the soldiers in their sleep.

When Ekowe, a week later, signalled that she could only hold out a few days longer as the provisions were exhausted, the gloomiest apprehensions began to be entertained.

The shopkeepers of the towns began to move their goods, and the farmers closed their homesteads and sent their families to Durban.

Much bitterness was caused by the non-arrival of reinforcements from Britain, and there were not wanting those who declared that the mother country had betrayed her trust. The tension was relaxed when troops at last began to trickle in. On the 29th Lord Chelmsford, heading a force of 4,000 British and 2,000 natives, chiefly Basutos, crossed the Tugela.

The greatest precautions were taken to prevent a surprise. During the day the cavalry scoured the surrounding country and at night the camps were intrenched. Great assistance was rendered by the scouts of the famous John Dunn, an Englishman, who, after living with the Zulus many years, had so completely won their confidence that they had made him a chief.

The military authorities were a little suspicious of this remarkable man at first, but he and his scouts soon proved their worth.

John Dunn told Lord Chelmsford how to beat the Zulus, and as his lordship was wise enough to take the advice we scored a great success in our next battle.

On the night of April 1st, our troops encamped at Gingihloo. Before dawn the Zulus had stealthily gathered round the camp, hoping to surprise us at daybreak. Colonel Parsons at Ekowe was, however, on the watch, and, as soon as the dusky horde had passed his tower, he flashed signals of their approach.

John Dunn had taught his old friends the use of firearms, but the savages relied more on their assegais. Advancing with the utmost daring, they endeavoured to get to close quarters, but their great rush was the signal for a torrent of lead from Gatling and rifle which brought the charge to a standstill.

Again and again they renewed the attack, but the hail of bullets was so great that they never got near enough to use their favourite weapon.

Full of resource, these born warriors then divided their forces, one column attacking us on the right whilst another assailed the rear. But they had to do with troops, who, although liable, owing to their reckless bravery, to be taken by surprise, had never yet been forced from a position they had taken up.

For two hours the Zulu wave surged to and fro. Then came one mighty rush. It was a gallant effort, but the leaden hail was too fierce, and the enemy broke and fled, pursued by the cavalry and native troops. The Zulu loss was over 1,600, ours about a dozen.

The joy of Ekowe when the relief party hove in sight was as great as that experienced by Ladysmith when Lord Dunlonald's troopers galloped into the town.

Matters had gone better with the force under Colonel Wood, who at the outset of the campaign had moved into Zululand from Utrecht in the Transvaal. On January 24th he had engaged 4,000 of the enemy at Intamba mountain, and won a victory. On hearing of the disaster at Isandhlana, Wood moved towards Bagulisini kraal, and later, on March 28th, captured Hiobani, Umbelini's mountain stronghold. On the return journey they encountered the Zulu impi. We had been trapped. It cost Wood 70 men and all the cattle he had captured to extricate himself, but he broke through at last and retreated to Kambula where he at once entrenched himself.

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He was only just in time, for the spades were still hard at work when 20,000 Zulus hove in sight. Kambula was one of the most desperately contested battles of the war. It lasted four hours and till the very last the result was doubtful. At one time the camp was broken into in no fewer than seven places, but the troops never wavered. If they had broken through in twenty places it would have been all the same. They would have to be got out.

Still, at one time our chances looked so bad that the native troops began to desert. The critical moment passed, and in the end the stolid, dogged valour of the British infantryman prevailed.

Bishop Colenso, backed by a little England party at home, did their best at this juncture to bring the war to a conclusion, but without success, which was fortunate, for after Kambula the tide of battle turned.

All the reinforcements from England having arrived, Lord Chelmsford, on April 15th, resumed operations. His lordship's task was terribly difficult, owing to the absence of roads impeding the transport. The country about Rorke's Drift being too rough even for the Cape waggons, a long circuit was made by way of Kopjie Allein, where the country was tolerably open. The general anxieties were further increased by the menacing attitude of the Boers.

Though these ungrateful people well knew that but for our intervention they would have been exterminated by the Zulus, they actually contemplated attacking us. Lord Chelmsford's force consequently was weakened by the necessity of detaching a force to keep the Transvaalers in check.

In all, 20,000 troops were engaged in the new campaign, in addition to 4,500 Colonials.

On June 2nd the Prince Imperial of France, who had joined our Army, was sent to the front to examine the line of march.

Having passed the Itilezi Hill the little band dismounted, and were partaking of their mid-day meal when a party of Zulus, creeping through the long tambuki grass, burst on the party. In the massacre which followed the Prince Imperial lost his life.

On July 4th, Colonel Wood having joined, the whole army advanced towards Ulundi. Anticipating attack Lord Chelmsford formed all his available men, not exceeding 4,500, into a hollow square. Against this living rampart 20,000 Zulus rushed with all their old intrepidity. After a fight which did not last half-an-hour the enemy fled leaving behind them over 1,000 dead warriors. Our loss was ten.

This defeat so cowed the Zulus that after the submission of the chiefs, Lord Gifford had no difficulty in capturing the deserted king, who, as is well known, was subsequently brought to this country.

The battle of Ulundi ended the Zulu war.

[*Next Week*: **The First and Second Afghan Wars.**]

"WHAT do you think of a friend who would not venture to plunge into a river for you when you were drowning?" asked the sentimental member of the club.

"I should say," replied Spicer, "that his friendship was all on the surface."

MRS. NEWWIFE: "I feel sure that Alfred will bring me a lovely present from the City to-day."

Miss Confidant: "An anniversary or birthday, dear?"

Mrs. Newwife: "Oh, dear, no! But we had a dreadful quarrel this morning."

Short Stories That . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "Guilty Gold," by Headon Hill, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, April 15th. Post-cards only, please. The prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. Arthur Wilson, of "Spring Close," Lenton, Nottingham, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus *.

ADMIRING FRIEND: "What makes you think your discovery was so great a success?"

Professor: "Why, as soon as I announced the idea every savant in Europe remembered that he had known of it since he cut his first tooth."

HURLY: "We always hang Uncle John's pictures in a prominent place. He's an artist, you know."

Burly: "A good one, I suppose?"

Hurly: "No, indeed. He doesn't know the first thing about painting."

Burly: "Then why——?"

Hurly: "Oh, he's very wealthy, and my wife expects to become his heiress."

MRS. EDITOR: "John, I want to ask you——"

Mr. Editor (testily): "Oh, you ask too many questions altogether. What do you want now?"

"I wanted to ask you what the title of your last article in the BOOM MAGAZINE was. Mrs. Brown read it and said it was perfect."

"That article? Oh, it was 'Don't be afraid to ask questions.'"

---

* THE other day a man entered a certain tavern in Nottingham and asked for a can of Nottingham beer. The barmaid said:

"We keep nothing else but Nottingham beer here."

"That's right," said the man, and he took a good drink, then he remarked:

"My word! it don't taste extra grand. I shouldn't be surprised if there was some arsenic in this."

"I know better," replied the girl, "it's been paralysed by three anarchists."

HER lip quivered and her breath came in laboured gasps, but she did not speak.

"Do you not love me?" he anxiously demanded, seizing her shrinking hand.

"I—I don't know," she faltered.

Gently he insinuated his arm about her.

"Darling," he murmured, "would you like to have me ask your mamma first?"

With a sudden cry of terror she grasped his arm.

"No, no, no!" she shrieked convulsively. "She is a widow; I want you myself."

She clung to him until he solemnly promised that he would say nothing to the old lady for the present.

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New Boarder (shivering): "This stove is too small for this room."

Landlady (kindly): "So it is. I'll have it moved into a smaller room for you."

Johnny: "Pa, what's the difference between cannibals and other folks?"

Pa: "Cannibals, my son, eat their enemies; other people generally go no further than to live on their friends and relatives."

"Now," said the physician, who is noted for his heavy charges, "I must take your temperature."

"All right," responded the patient in a tone of utter resignation. "You have got about everything else I own. There's no reason why you should not take that too."

Greatheart: "And you saw him insult a woman, and didn't knock him down?"

Littlesole: "What! Strike a man in the presence of a lady?"

Greatheart: "Lady! What lady?"

Littlesole: "Why, the lady he was insulting."

"Blitherby's restaurant has the slowest service I ever saw," said the Gentleman with the Gloomy Brow.

"How's that?" asked the Individual with the Overworked Smile.

"I ordered some eggs there once, and I had to wait so long that they brought me——"

"Chickens?"

"No. Eggs that had been laid by the chickens hatched from the eggs I had ordered."

Some time ago while I was trading in a village store one of the clerks came to the junior partner, who was waiting on me, and said:

"Please step to the desk. Pat Flynn wants to settle his account and wants a receipt."

The merchant was evidently annoyed.

"Why, what does he want with a receipt?" he said; "we never give one. Simply cross his account off the book; that is receipt enough."

"So I told him," answered the clerk, "but he is not satisfied. You had better see him."

So the proprietor stepped to the desk, and, after greeting Pat with a "Good morning," said:

"You want to settle your bill, do you?"

Pat replied in the affirmative.

"Well," said the merchant, "there is no need for me to give you a receipt, See! I will cross your account off the book," and suiting the action to the word, he drew his pencil diagonally across the account. "That is a good receipt."

"And do you mane that that settles it?" exclaimed Pat.

"That settles it," said the merchant.

"And ye're sure ye'll never be askin' me for it again?"

"We'll never ask you for it again," said the merchant decidedly.

"Faith, thin," said Pat, "I'll be after kapin' me money in me pocket, for I haven't paid it."

"Oh, well, I can rub that out!"

"Faith, now, and I thought the same," said Pat.

It is needless to add that Pat got his receipt.

He: "What can I do to make you happy?"
She: "Do without."
He: "Without what?"
She: "Me."

He (contritely): "Are you angry?"
She (firmly): "Yes, I am."
He: "Because I kissed you?"
She: "Be-because you stopped." [No cards.]

Foggs: "It is said that a man once addicted to a vice can never really give it up."

Trotter: "I believe it, too. I know a gambler who is reformed, but every day he plays solitaire and bets with himself that he'll win."

A friend of mine has a little boy who has just reached the age when he is interesting. The other afternoon he was found sitting on the steps of the verandah looking very much downcast, and his mother asked him what the trouble was.

"We'll have to move away from here," he said.

"Why?" asked his mother.

"Oh, I've fought every kid in the street, and there ain't any more fun here."

A professor of logic, who was not particularly lucid in his lectures, was on one occasion endeavouring to substantiate that "an article remains the same notwithstanding the substitution of some of its parts."

A young student held up a knife and inquired:

"Suppose I should lose the blade of this knife and should get another one made and inserted in its place, would it be the same knife as it was before?"

"To be sure," replied the professor.

"Well, then," the student went on, "suppose I should lose the handle and get another, would it be the same knife still?"

"Of course," the professor again replied.

"But if somebody should find the old blade and the old handle, and should put them together, what knife would that be?"

The professor's answer is not recorded.

The auctioneer at a horse sale was trying to dispose of a poor broken-down hack, which seemed to have seen the last of its working days. But Mr. Hammer considered it his duty to extol the merits of whatever was intrusted to him for sale, and so to get the best price possible. So he asked:

"Does any gentleman bid £30 for this valuable horse?"

A bystander offered thirty shillings.

"Oh! gentlemen," protested the auctioneer, "that is really absurd. Only thirty shillings offered for an animal like this! Why, only the day before yesterday, it did its two miles in six minutes!"

But no other bid was made, and the horse was knocked down for thirty shillings. The purchaser soon found that, instead of doing two miles in six minutes, it looked more like doing two miles in six days. He returned to the sale ring furious.

"What made you say this brute had done two miles in six minutes?"

"But so it did," said the auctioneer, "the day before yesterday."

"And where, may I ask, did this wonderful performance take place?"

"In a railway train," said Mr. Hammer, smiling.

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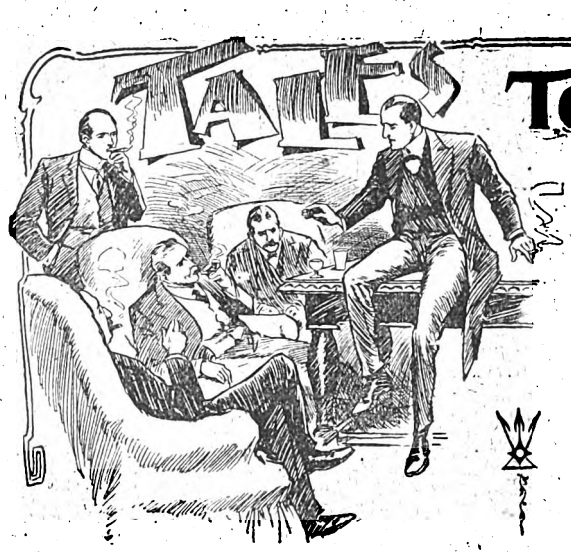

Told off Duty.

[You probably don't know the "Stand-Easy" Club. It isn't in the directory, and you might live next door to the place for years without knowing of its existence by that name. It isn't a conventional club; there is no subscription, and there is no register of members. It is merely a room in a quiet, orderly, and select hostelry in Westminster, where, by common consent, a number of officials of all kinds meet when "off duty." There you may find detectives from Scotland Yard, near by; firemen, commissionaires, a soldier or two, and maybe a doctor from St. Thomas' Hospital or elsewhere. A motley crowd they would be if they wore their uniforms, but at the "Stand-Easy" uniforms are a rarity, "mufti" being the unwritten rule. The result is a gathering of quiet, well-behaved, and well-dressed men. Saturday night is the time when one sees the biggest muster, for then it is the custom for one member to regale the company with a story, the story being, as a rule, an account of some incident in the teller's own career.]

Mad Mortimer's Daughter.

Told by the FIREMAN.

"WELL," said Trebilco; Jack Trebilco, the hero of a hundred fires in and around the great city, "when a fire gets real grip and hold of a building in which are human beings, you may look for something to happen in the shape of excitement and adventure, such as no other calling or duty affords."

"Your life's been pretty well full of the very best brand of that sort of stuff," remarked Sergeant Major Tarrant, "hasn't it Jack?"

"Oh! I don't know! I've seen a bit, I suppose, same as others."

"Then you won't have any difficulty," said I quickly, "in finding something to tell us worth hearing?"

There is nothing vain or conceited about Jack, he being one of the old Sergeant's School, as modest as they make them.

"I'm not a good hand at yarn spinning," he said, settling himself comfortably on a corner of the table facing our little circle, "but anyway, I'll do my best."

"What's it about?" interrupted Martin Cuffe.

"Oh! you'll see by-and-bye; but I call it 'Mad Mortimer's Daughter.'"

"Ah!" said old Martin, rubbing his hands, "that sounds lively! Go ahead Jack!"

* * * * *

"It all happened while I was stationed over Old Kent Road way; or rather, between that and the Walworth Road.

"It's a perfect network of small, mean, dirty streets thereabouts; the houses being, most of them, old, rotten, and from the Brigade point of view, at least, dangerously inflammable.

"Under these circumstances fires in the neighbourhood are both frequent and destructive; and speaking for myself, for nights in succession I haven't had my clothes off.

"There is a certain street that runs from near the 'Elephant' end of the Walworth Road to the 'Paragon' in the Old Kent Road.

"The 'Paragon,' as every Surrey-sider knows, is a big block of model dwellings on the right hand side of the latter; one of the first of the kind ever built, and a little way beyond the Elephant and Castle Station of the Chatham and Dover railway. Some little distance up Castle Street is another and newer block of a slightly inferior class.

"Here lived for many years, up to the summer before last, old Dave Mortimer and his daughter Kate. Mrs. Mortimer, Dave's wife, was long dead, Kate now acting as housekeeper to about the crankiest, most cantankerous old rascal to be found anywhere.

"How I came to know Kate Mortimer was like this:

"The wife of one of our married chaps was taken ill (went off her head, in fact, after the birth of her baby), and had to be sent away from home for some months.

"Poor Goss was at his wit's end as to what to do with the little one.

"'Let Katie Mortimer have it,' said the Superintendent. 'I know her; and she'll be just delighted to look after the kid 'till your missus is all right again.'

"No sooner said than done. Goss called within the hour at Castle Buildings, and saw the girl, who came round the same evening to fetch the baby.

"Some people, perhaps, mightn't have called her pretty, or even good-looking; but I liked the look of her. I was cleaning and polishing a 'steamer' when she came in, and as I saw her through the glass partition, sitting in the Superintendent's room with the child in her arms, crowing to and smiling at it till it was purple in the face with excited satisfaction, I said to myself, 'that's the girl for me.'

"Her father, old Dave Mortimer, was a well-known character in South London.

"There was no secret about his mode of life; there couldn't very well be; for the misery wrought by him in his dealings with poor folk, made him to be, I think, the best hated man from Newington Butts to New Cross. He was a terror.

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"And yet he was a necessity in a way.

"There is a class of people, who, living as they do from hand to mouth, are continually in sore straits for a little ready money for the purchase of stock, etc. This they generally procure from such as old Mortimer, and when once in Shylock's clutches, it is all up with them, for in nine cases out of ten, they never manage to get free again.

"It has always been a wonder to me, how such a miserable, mean, cruel-minded old curmudgeon could ever have had a daughter like Kate: for the two were as unlike in mind and body, as darkness is to light.

"It was said that the old money-lender had a grudge against our station people, because none of us would deal with him. But even had we wished to do so, we could not, as it was against the rules of the Brigade.

"Fortunately he was out when Goss called to see his daughter, so that until the child was actually in the house he was altogether ignorant of the transaction.

"How Kate managed the matter, I didn't know for ever so long, till—till, in fact, we walked out together; even then she kept something back, for she always shied when I approached the subject.

"When the old man heard, which he soon did, that his daughter had taken unto herself a sweetheart, and that, too, the man was a fireman, he raved like a madman.

"That he was at all times mad to a certain extent, I fully believe; or he wouldn't have acted as he did.

"I met him accidentally one morning just by St. George's Church.

"'Here! you!' he cried, coming closer up to me and putting his face into mine almost, 'I want you to understand that my girl's not for you! D'ye hear! Not for you!'

"I didn't want to offend him, of course, so I just tried to comb him down quietly.

"'Will you let me come and talk it over with you, Mr. Mortimer?' I said. 'Perhaps I shall be able to convince you that a fireman isn't necessarily a bad lot.'

"'No! Keep away! Don't come near my place! If you do, I'll shut the door in your face—I will! Now, you know.'

"What could I say? I thought it best to say nothing, and so I left him, making motions after me like some huge ape, as I passed up the High Street towards the 'Elephant.'

"My girl, mind you, was not deceitful. She never concealed from her father that she cared for me, and that she periodically met me and went out with me. She was not afraid of him, it was he who was afraid of her. His shady tricks to get more than his pound of flesh sickened her, and she often told me, in moments of confidence, that she never meant to touch one farthing of anything that he might leave behind him.

"There was one peculiarity with regard to our meetings. viz:—that there was always a third party present in the person of little Nannie Goss.

"Kate knew her father too well to leave the child behind to his tender mercies; and as I had no objection to its presence, poor little mite! she just wrapped it up warmly, and brought it along.

"The love nonsense that was exchanged over that small head was enough to have charmed away every symptom of hair from off it for ever; for Kitty and I were only like to others in similar cases, and—made two fools of ourselves.

"Possibly, had certain things not then occurred, we should have quietly married one fine morning (first giving the old man fair and due notice of our intention); but it took a long time for the course of our love to run smooth.

"Whether Dave Mortimer became unduly irritable and sullen, owing to business disappointments; or whether it was that the presence of Goss' little one annoyed him, and rubbed him the wrong way, I can't say; I only know that from a certain date, that is after the child had been in Kate's keeping about three months, he left no stone unturned that might make his daughter's life a misery to her.

"'Here! you!' he cried, coming closer up to me and putting his face into mine almost, 'I want you to understand that my girl's not for you! D'ye hear! Not for you!'"

"It could not have been because there was any extra expense put upon him by reason of Nannie's temporary residence under his roof, for Goss, though Kate was dead against his doing so, insisted upon paying all out-of-pocket expenses.

"I'm inclined to think that it was a combination of unpleasant circumstances that influenced Dave to persecute Kate at this time, as he undoubtedly did. Sometimes he would, so she tearfully told me, be downright savage in voice and manner; and then she would snatch up the child, run round to the station, and sit for an hour with the Superintendent's wife in the hope that it would blow over.

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"I well remember one such occasion, more especially as it immediately preceded that other event, which has cast a shadow on Kate's life, that nothing will ever quite clear away.

"Goss had told me in the morning that his missus was rapidly getting better, and that he hoped to have her home again in a fortnight.

"About six o'clock in the evening I was standing at the open station door, smoking an after-tea pipe, when looking up the street, I saw a woman flying towards me with a baby in her arms. She was without either hat or jacket, and was evidently breathless from agitation and haste.

"It was Katie!

"'What's up?' I said, as she turned in, panting at the door.

"'Oh, Jack. Father—he nearly killed little Nannie just now! He threw the lamp at her as she lay on the chair-bedstead!—and—it's a mercy that it wasn't alight!'

"'The old villain!' I couldn't help saying. 'But, there, Kitty! I mustn't speak my mind, I suppose as he's your father. Never worry yourself, dear! come into Mrs. Zunts' room!'

"I imagine that she must have sat there an hour; and it was agreed between herself and Goss, that, if on her return she found her father to be still implacable, she should bring the child round and let Mrs. Zunts look after it for the few days remaining.

"So, then, it was settled; and I myself accompanied the two back to Castle Buildings.

"'Cheer up, dear!' I said, as hopefully as I could, 'things are never so bad that they mayn't be worse.'

"As I went away, though, I felt far from easy; but what could I do? As yet I had no right to interfere beyond the right of affection, and that isn't, unfortunately, a legal quantity. I could only watch, and stand ready to chip in when the need came.

"It was really my 'turn-in' at the station that night, but somehow I had no desire for sleep. I was fidgety without being able to give myself any reason.

"'Hullo! Jack! aren't you going to bed?' said the Superintendent to me about 11.30.

"'No!' said I. 'I couldn't rest if I did. Fact is, sir, I'm uneasy about Katie and the kid. That old blackguard is up to some mischief, I'm convinced, and—and—well, I'll just hang around, in case of anything wrong.'

"'Oh! all right! I don't suppose Blake (the night watchman), will object, it'll be company for him. Good-night!'

"At twenty minutes past twelve it was that the alarm sounded.

"'Outbreak in Castle Street, Old Kent Road.'

"Like a lunatic I hurried up the men, and did more than my share in harnessing and getting under-weigh.

"Within almost record time of the 'call,' we turned out, and dashed at headlong speed in the direction of the 'flare.'

"One word, and one only burst into my brain—'Katie!—Katie!—Katie!'

"Oh, Heavens! if harm should happen to her! and through that old reprobate. I would kill him!

"As the 'steamer' raced through the nearly-deserted streets, I could see by the dull, red, angry glow, that it was no child's play we were in for—that the fire was a serious one.

"We were not as yet absolutely certain that it was Castle Buildings that was ablaze; that confirmation of my worst fears only came with our turning into the street itself.

"The Superintendent—Heaven bless him!—knew the mental agony I was enduring, and made large allowance for it.

"When all doubt was at an end (though, strange to say, I had been sure all along), of the fire's locality, he just let me work my own way; knowing that my very anxiety, my love for Katie, would make me to do the right thing.

"Forcing our way through the packed crowd (where all the people came from is a mystery), we at last succeeded in joining two other 'steamers' from Southwark and New Cross, and quickly got to work.

"Of course, Southwark, being headquarters, the people

"How I discovered Katie I shall never really know. I had her in my arms. I cared for nothing else."

from there had all the say; but right or wrong, I didn't care for anybody, and from first to last that night I worked on my own.

"The street is a narrow one, and the houses on both sides of the way are of five and six stories.

"Castle Buildings, which are on the right, are the higher, and from structural arrangements (an area with tall railings in front) are more difficult of scaling in times of danger.

"The Mortimers lived, as I have said, on the third floor—Kate's bedroom facing the street—the sitting-room looking into the court-yard at the back.

"The fire seemed to be confined to the third floor, although, naturally, the danger was (even in a professedly fire-proof building) that it would spread upwards.

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"I soon learnt that the inmates were still within, and the knowledge drove me almost to desperation. I did not hesitate a second; but at once made for the common stairway.

"Another fireman followed to help, but—a bit savagely I fear—I told him to 'Go back!' adding with a shout: 'This is my work.'

"Half-way up I was stopped for a minute by the choking smoke that rolled in dense black clouds down the well of the staircase.

"Getting out a piece of linen rag—such as I always carry—I stooped and soaked it in the water that was already rushing in streams down the stone steps. This I placed over my mouth, holding it there with one hand, and charged through the smoke again.

"It was a case of feeling for the outer door of the flat I sought, though I was in a measure guided by my intimate knowledge of its position.

"I know, of course, that it is bad to let in air upon a raging fire, but I was determined at any risk to get my darling out. I therefore hacked away with my hatchet until I drove the lock panel in, when, with a crash, the door fell inwards.

"It was literally an oven of fire!

"The smell of paraffin was everywhere, telling its own tale.

"I did not shout or cry out, though I restrained myself with difficulty; for I knew that anyone inside would be rendered unconscious by smoke fumes, and so unable to hear anything.

"How I discovered Katie I shall never really know. I had her in my arms. I cared for nothing else.

"I speedily found that the way I had come was now irretrievably blocked; that through the window into the street was my only chance to get to safety with my precious burden.

"Though rapidly becoming weaker from the effects of smoke and heat, I could distinctly hear the rattle of the escape as it was being adjusted outside.

"I dragged myself to the window, the framework of which was a mass of glowing wood.

"I think it must have been the air through the window that roused Katie, for just as I was putting her into the 'canvas,' she managed to cry: 'The baby!—Nannie!—on the bed!'

That kid is perhaps playing at this minute round at the station at hide-and-seek among the wheels of the 'steamer' and the 'hose cart,' but she will never know, poor little soul! how near to death she was that night when I caught her up and staggered to the window with her.

"At that moment, too, as if to make my situation the more perilous, a large piece of coping came crashing down from above upon the escape, striking it mid-way. Like a reed it parted, the upper portion thundering down to the ground.

"'Jack! Jack!' shouted the Superintendent between his hands from below. 'I've got the sheet ready! You must jump!'

"In less time than it takes to tell it the wrecked escape was cleared away, and a dozen men were at the sheet.

"I dropped down the child first, as tenderly as I could; waited a second for them to remove her, and then sprang into space.

"Where was old Dave? Why did I not strive to save him?

"Well, you must have a very poor opinion of me, mates, if you think as I'd leave my worst enemy to perish, if it were in any way possible for me to rescue him.

"No, I ought to have said that the very first object over which I stumbled across the shattered front door was the blackened body of Dave Mortimer.

"Living, I should have given him of my best—for humanity's sake—but dead! I left him, for I could do nothing for him; and—there were lives to be saved.

"Neither Katie nor little Nannie were seriously the worse for all they went through, although my girl's tender heart is to this day clouded, every now and again, with the shadow of it all.

"We have a little one of our own now, and Nannie is, by self-appointment, the fairy godmother.

"The origin of the fire was easily traceable to the soaked bedclothes, from the thrown lamp of an hour or two before, and a subsequent dropping upon them of a lighted match, or something similar."

* * * * *

"Bravo! bravo! my boy!" cried Sergeant Tarrant. "You deserve all the happiness you've got; and—and I'd like to see your missus, and tell her so—there."

WHO KILLED - - - - JAMES TRENT?

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NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOURS.

—:— *A Seaside Sketch.* —:—

ALTHOUGH I had no idea who she was, it was impossible to help being interested in her.

In the first place, our balconies joined, and, somehow or other, every time I thought I should like to see what sort of a night it was, she seemed struck with the same idea; and I could never go out of my long French window without being perfectly certain that I should see her in her sweeping black dress, heavily trimmed with crape, gazing, with tear-dewed eyes, at the lovely moonlight scene before her.

Then there was most certainly an air of mystery about her that was most tantalising. She could not be a widow, because she had no wedding ring; she could not be an orphan, because her father and mother were, at times, visible or audible.

No other relation's loss could possibly have affected her as this loss seemed to have done; and I had reluctantly come to the conclusion that she must be mourning over the untimely fate of her *fiancé*, when a most curious and unforeseen circumstance suddenly gave me the required clue to her state of depression and misery, and put it in my power to do her a service that has rendered her, she declares, my grateful friend and—well, something else, into which we need not enter at present, until her life's end.

I had come down to Southcove to recover my health, after a long and serious illness, brought on by overstudy and grief at the sudden death of one of my most intimate college friends—a friend who had been far more to me than any one of my relations had ever been, and with whom I had lived with that perfect accord that is very rarely witnessed in this world of ours. We had often talked over the mysteries of life, and the still greater mysteries of death; and the very day on which Brian Ormonde had gone out of my rooms for that fatal ride, he and I had laughingly promised each other that, whoever died first, would do his best to revisit the earth, and in some way or other would communicate with the survivor.

For weeks I had expected Brian to visit me. I had sat up at nights, with my windows open, imploring, praying him to come in, if but for an instant, to assure me of his existence in another world. I had sat silent, almost breathlessly listening for his whisper, or his footfall on my staircase. I had commanded, besought, ordered him to redeem his promise; but not one sign, not one token, was vouchsafed to break the sudden silence that fell between us on that awful afternoon.

The strain, coming as it did after long days and nights of severe reading, was too much for me and I fell desperately ill; and as soon as I was on the way to recovery, and change was suggested, suddenly I remembered Southcove, and determined to regain my lost strength in a place that Ormonde and I had often enough talked of visiting, and, somehow or other, had never been able to go to in any of our outings.

Of course, doctor, mother, sisters, and all objected strongly to Southcove; anything that reminded me of Brian must be bad for me. Southcove was dull, it was damp, it was lonely. Let me try Bournemouth or Brighton; anywhere except the one place that I, with the perversity of a convalescent, determined was the only spot on earth where I should have the rest and peace I felt positively necessary to my well being.

Besides this, a mysterious certainty arose in my breast that in my illness, when naturally the blank wall erected by the flesh between the spirit and the outer world had been rendered less dense than usual by my sufferings, I had had some communication with Brian after all. I felt positive that he had come to me, and had whispered Southcove three distinct times. And though, of course, I kept this notion to myself, for fear of being considered a lunatic, the stronger I got the more determined I was to have my own way; and, finally, I set out for Southcove quite alone, reaching it just three months after the day on which all that was mortal of Brian Ormonde had been committed to the earth from which he sprang.

Southcove was undoubtedly a dull place, possessing few, if any, attractions to the ordinary tourist; and, until I discovered the presence of my next-door neighbour, I almost wished I had not been quite so obstinate in my two purposes of visiting Southcove and visiting it alone; for beyond strolling down to the wretched little wooden pier, and gazing for a steamer that never came in, and ransacking the small circulating library for novels, there was literally nothing whatever to do.

Still, the library was most certainly an endless source of entertainment, owing to the peculiar collection of volumes to be found therein.

There were books long since forgotten by all save the writers; there were efforts of local geniuses, stung to desperation by the dulness of the place into evoking a little wild adventure out of their inner consciousness; and there were battered and worn out copies of all sorts of favourite books, marked all over by the appreciative pencils of visitors, who had been obliged to find some vent for their superfluous energies in making remarks, opprobrious and otherwise—first on the volumes themselves, and afterwards on the remarks of those who had gone before them—until I almost felt obliged to follow their evil example, and, in sheer despair, add the emphatic "fool" or "idiot" that I felt trembled on my pencil. One afternoon it had all at once occurred to me that I had a long evening before me, and that, having concluded as much as remained of the third volume of a most thrilling narrative all about smugglers who had lived in and round Southcove, whose doings certainly did not redound to the credit of the place, I should be reduced to despair or original composition if I did not arm myself with another store of reading.

So I put on my hat, and made for the library, considerably hastening my steps when I perceived that a storm was brewing, and that we had possibly before us one of those south-westerly gales that are certainly seen to perfection in Southcove, if nowhere else. When I reached the little emporium—not for worlds would I

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shock the Misses Brown's feelings by calling it a shop—I met my fair unknown just emerging from it, carrying quite a stock of literature. She, too, patronised the library then. Well, perhaps Miss Mary Brown, who wore curls, and had once been engaged, could tell me her name if nothing else.

"Good afternoon, Miss Brown," I remarked airily; "I've come to change my books."

"You're in luck's way this afternoon," answered she with a smile. "'Miss Neville has just brought back the very best book in the library. She told me she hoped she had not spoilt it, but it was so moving, she could not help shedding tears over it.

"'Never you mind, miss,' I replied, 'tears on the pages of books are like hall marks on silver. I shan't have to recommend it now; it will most certainly speak for itself.'"

"This is all, I suppose?" I asked carelessly, taking up a small pile of books on the counter that remained just where Miss Neville had put them. "Well, I'll try them, Miss Mary. I expect Miss Neville's tears will be quite as eloquent as any of the pencil-marks in the 'Jolly Buccaneer.' By the way, do you know anything of Miss Neville? I can't help thinking that she has recently had some great grief."

"She'll always possess a grief as long as she has them parents of hers about," said Miss Mary impressively. "My first cousin does for them at the lodgings, Mr. Westwood. She've seen better days like the rest of us; and she has to take in quiet families now and then. She says the life that poor girl leads is awful. There's money and land in the family, which would have come to them if she had been a boy; and, as she wasn't, they can't forgive her. She was engaged to her cousin the heir, but she did not like him; and when he died suddenly they blamed it on to her, and said her conduct to him had made him reckless. It is a shame; she is sweet, Mr. Westwood, and deserves a better fate. But there, I must not gossip—Medina always says my tongue runs a great deal too fast."

"Oh, never mind," I said. "I longed to hear all that you have told me. I noticed how sad she was. But I can't help thinking she loved her cousin; her eyes are never free from tears."

"I don't know more than I have told you," said Mary Brown. "My cousin says that she hated him. Well, good night, Mr. Westwood. I'm sure that you will find 'Maude Vavasour' the very book to help you to pass the time. We're going to have a nasty night." And so saying, she handed me my books; and I went out into the small narrow street, down which the wind was already roaring in a most suggestive manner.

It was indeed a nasty night. Almost before tea (my lodgings did not rise to the heights of a late dinner) was cleared away. I began to see that the balcony would not have the pleasure of my company that evening. The rain came down in streams, the carpet gently moved up and down like a theatrical ocean, and the wind howled and screamed as if a hundred demons had been let loose.

No, there was nothing for it but to make the best of a bad job; and, taking a firm grip of "Maude Vavasour," I sat down to read.

I had only just begun to open the books, peeping first into one and then into another, when something fluttered down on my lap, from Heaven knows where.

Of course, as I discovered afterwards, it had fallen from the book in my hand; but at first I really did believe that I had a message from the dead, for there before me were the well-known characters of Brian Ormonde's writing—so distinct, so curious, so unlike any other writing, I could not think that I was mistaken in believing

I met my fair unknown just emerging from the emporium carrying quite a stock of literature.

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that I had at last received the token from my dead friend that I had so long been expecting.

It was quite ten minutes before I recovered myself sufficiently to be able to examine the sheet of paper; and then I discovered that, whoever the message had been sent to it certainly was not intended for me; for

Something fluttered down on my lap, from Heaven knows where.

it was nothing save a short epistle, imploring someone, whose name was not mentioned, to give him time, only time, when all his demands should be satisfied in full.

I could not understand it at all. That Brian, of all people in the world, should be in difficulties, unknown to me, was ridiculous. And I was about to tear the letter up somewhat indignantly, when my eye fell on some other writing on the half-sheet that had been blank when the letter left Brian's hands.

And I at once received a clue to the mystery; for on the other side, under the grimy signature of George Priestley, was set forth an account of sundry monies supposed to be due from Brian Ormonde, to him; and a statement that, if he were not repaid by Monday week, he would come to Neville Court, and then and there insist on seeing Mr. Neville, and placing before him a still further and more lucid account of all that Brian Ormonde had been, which was not the meek saint, he added, that the family was pleased to consider that he was.

A burning sense of indignation seized me, and had George Priestley been anywhere near, he would have been slightly astonished, I think. I knew the rascal so well. A smug-faced, leery billiard marker, who wormed himself into the secrets of every lad who was weak enough to borrow money of him, and who was the scorn and byword of every decent man in the University.

That he should attempt to blackmail the Nevilles was not in the least extraordinary. The only extraordinary circumstance was, how he had come possessed of a letter that was most certainly, alas, in the hand-writing of my dear, dead friend.

This had so overcome me, that for some time I had not troubled myself to account for my present possession of the epistle. All I could think of was, how I could manage to get hold of Priestley, and drag out of his vile carcass the truth that, of course, he was carefully perverting to his own ends; but before I was able to come to any satisfactory conclusion on the subject, it was suddenly borne in upon me that I had no business whatever to be in possession of a letter that was most certainly the property of someone else.

Then I recollected who that someone else was, and I made up my mind immediately to introduce myself to Miss Neville, and regardless of *les convenances*, tell her precisely how matters stood; at the same time letting her know that she had left George Priestley's letter in "Maude Vavasour," and that it could not possibly have fallen into better hands than mine. Once more I took up the epistle and looked at the date. There was none; but allowing for the fact that the letter had had to be forwarded, and that it was now Wednesday, I came to the conclusion that there was certainly no time to be lost, or the fellow might turn up, as he said he would, and bully Miss Neville, even if he were kept from seeing the old people.

The night seemed to become worse every minute; the wind howled louder than ever, until a final blast appeared to literally throw itself against the house, like an enraged animal, that took it in its jaws, and shook it, finally casting it down contemptuously with a final shake. This final shake, directed as it was against my windows caused them to fly open madly, and the whole fury of the storm became apparent in my room.

Newspapers flew about like enormous birds; the wretched engravings on the walls swung about madly, until I hoped that they would be smashed; and the mantelpiece ornaments, after gyrating wildly for a few seconds, fell forward, and were reduced to chaos on the hearth in less time than it takes to relate the story. I rose, and, walking up to the windows, endeavoured to close them; but I discovered that the hasp of the fastening and one of the hinges were departed, and that I should be obliged to barricade the place if I wished peace to be restored.

I went out on the balcony, with the feeble idea that I had seen a thick cord there during my stay at Southcove, which I might utilize in my defences; but I was horrified to discover that Miss Neville, undaunted by the storm, had come out as usual, and was clinging to her balcony, while watching the progress of the storm.

The noise was really awful; the sea thundered in over the point, where even in the darkness one could see a line of white foam that told its own tale of the jagged rocks that stretched like teeth into the cove, and that had been the death of many a gallant ship. The great towering masses of cloud were driven rapidly across the sky, and ever and anon a pale, wild, watery moon would be visible for a moment, looking as if she were protesting vainly against the wild commotion that appeared to hurry her along, too, and prevented her doing her nightly duty; but she glanced out ever and anon through the veil of vapour and cloud that surrounded her, she sent short, brilliant shafts of light down the darkness

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like silver arrows, that disclosed now and then the entire scene as clearly as if it were day-light.

One of those shafts had just fallen when I stepped out into the balcony, else surely in the blackness I should never have seen that Miss Neville was there.

In an instant I determined to speak, come what might, and although the howling of the wind made my voice almost inaudible, I went up to her and said:

"You must forgive me for addressing you, dear Miss Neville, but Brian Ormonde was my dearest friend, and I cannot allow his cousin to be in distress, and not offer her my help in any way that can be useful to her."

"Then you have found the letter?" exclaimed Miss Neville. "Oh, if only the wind would stop for one instant! I know I am not doing wrong; Brian would not be angry; and oh, Mr. Westwood, I shall go mad if something is not done!"

I started at hearing my name. How did she know it? I wondered; but I would not stop to ask questions. Already I heard behind me a dreadful smash, that told me one of my enemies, the engravings, had dropped from the wall.

In another moment my landlady would be up, to see if I had gone mad; there was no time to lose.

"The wind is too terrible now," I said, "for our conversation to be satisfactory. Can I meet you anywhere to-morrow?"

"It must be this evening," said Miss Neville, wringing her hands.

"Could you not close your window, and remain here for half-an-hour? On a still night my father and mother would hear our voices; and something must be done. I hope, oh, I hope you will not think me crazy, but as you have read that letter, you will understand that this is not a time for me to be scrupulous."

Bang—smash! another picture had gone; things were becoming desperate.

"I will do what I can," I shrieked, "but I am afraid that will not be much. Creep over the balcony into my house, Miss Neville," I suggested, after a moment's thought.

"I will lock my door; no one shall know that you are there. The window once shut, we shall be safe enough."

Miss Neville hesitated for a minute.

"That would never do," she said, after a pause. "You must come round and call, Mr. Westwood; introduce yourself as a friend of Brian's; then I will let you out after you have paid your visit. I can manage the rest, I think. Now go, or else every picture in the room will be smashed. I shall expect you in ten minutes."

And so saying, she turned away; and as I went back into my room, I heard her window open, a swirl of air go through the house, and then all was peace—except in my chamber, however; there everything looked like the incarnation of war. There was nothing for it but to ring my bell and summon assistance, while I stood with my back to the window, keeping it closed until my landlord came.

Luckily, he was a "handy man," and, in less time than it takes to tell it, he was at work repairing the damages that were repairable; the pictures, thank goodness, were beyond his skill; while I, after making a very faint attempt at assisting him, took up my hat, and remarking that, as the room was so very uncomfortable, I had made up my mind to call on some friends, I went off next door, having no time to ponder on how I should introduce myself to Mr. Neville, of whose existence I had never heard until that day, not even from Brian himself.

I was shown into a room the very counterpart of my own. On one side of the fire crouched a man, who ought to have been in the prime of life, but who appeared almost any age, so crumpled up, so lined, so aged seemed his face and figure, while round his legs was wrapped a red rug, and his shoulders were embellished by a white shawl that gave him at once the look of the invalid that a collection of pillows at his back seemed to indicate that he was.

On the sofa on the other side, reposed a woman with the sweetest expression of countenance I had ever beheld; while Miss Neville sat on a low stool between them, holding the long white fingers of her mother's hand, gently stroking them between her own. She rose when I entered, and, coming towards me, she said:

"I have just been telling mother of our meeting, Mr. Westwood. She thinks it so good of you to come out such a night as this to tell us of dear Brian."

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Neville. "Mr. Neville is so anxious to see you, dear Mr. Westwood. We are such wretched invalids, we know nothing of dear Brian's death. We could not go to the funeral, and——"

"We know all about it," growled Mr. Neville. "Her conduct did it," and he pointed a lean, trembling finger at his daughter's shrinking form. "I want to know about his life, Mr. Westwood; death is a dismal subject always, more especially on such a night as this."

I took my cue at once, and, as well as I could, I dwelt on all my dear friend's sweetness and goodness; and we remained talking until the clock struck eleven, when I rose to go.

Miss Neville came down, at her father's request, to

I was horrified to discover that Miss Neville was clinging to her balcony.

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On on side of the fire crouched a man, who appeared almost any age, so old seemed his face and figure.

show me out. Instead of opening the front door she motioned me into a side room, and, turning up the gas, she at once began her story.

If seems that Miss Brown's cousin had been right, and that Mr. Neville had never forgiven his only child for being a girl, and that his one solace had been in planning a marriage between the cousins—a marriage that was mutually repugnant, and that neither ever intended should be carried out. Brian was already engaged to a charming girl—a lady, the daughter of his old tutor—who was fully cognizant of the curious position he held, and to whom Miss Neville had been goodness itself as soon as Brian had told her how he was situated.

Although Neville Court must come to him at his uncle's death, during his life he had not a shilling; and, although he had often implored his uncle to join with him in cutting off the entail, old Mr. Neville's pride would not allow this, and up to the last Brian remained dependent on his uncle for every farthing he possessed, in a manner that was so extremely galling to his high spirits that he could never be brought to confess his circumstances even to me, to whom he had seemed to tell everything, and had in reality not told a single event of his life.

In the middle of the Long Vacation, Ormonde's tutor died suddenly, leaving his daughter penniless. Of course, Brian married her, and equally, of course, Miss Neville knew the secret, and had to assist in keeping it from her father, whose fragile health rendered it imperative that all disquieting news should be kept from him as much as possible.

Here, then, was the situation; old Mr. Neville ignorant of Brian's marriage; pleased to think that, in default of male heirs, the Court would lapse to his daughter; utterly unable to bear the blow that the marriage would be to him, more especially when Mrs. Ormonde was most likely a mother; and Mr. Neville believing in Brian implicitly, too; while George Priestley had become possessed of the secret, and was using it to extract money from Miss Neville, who would give all she possessed, she said, to save her parents from any more trouble and disappointment.

"You see, my birth was such a blow to them," she said, smiling sadly, as she concluded her long story; "and now they think the Court comes to me, my father is just beginning to love me. Fancy what father's feelings would be if this wretched man gets hold of him; I am sure he would never survive the shock, and then my dear gentle mother would die too. Oh! Mr. Westwood, she has always loved me; but her life is bound up in my father's. Oh, tell me what to do!"

Assuring Miss Neville that night would bring me counsel, and that I would see Priestley myself the following day, and bring her news on the Friday or Saturday at the latest, I went into my own room, meditating sadly enough on the state of things; but, most of all, I felt Brian's want of confidence towards myself. While I was pondering on all this, a thought literally rushed into my head.

Priestley posessed a secret of Brian's; could it possibly be some other secret, not the one we dreaded.

In a moment afterwards it all came back to me—Brian's love of the turf, his possession of a race-horse. I rose and opened Brian's desk—a task I had never yet felt equal to before.

Yes, there it was, all in black and white, neatly docketed, as were all Brian's papers, the last indorsed: "Priestley's receipt in full for which I thank God!"

I did sleep that night, I can tell you; and the next afternoon found me closeted with that delightful man, whose presence I did not leave until I held his confession written out plainly enough, on consideration that I did not prosecute him for endeavouring to procure money under false pretences. Brian's letter had appeared to him a trump card to play; it had confessed nothing, but implied much. Of course, Miss Neville would only be too glad to shield the name of the man to whom she had been engaged to be married, and would buy this, and a few more equally compromising, at his own price. How Brian had been such a fool as to write those letters, I never made out, or why he had not seen them burnt; but, on looking at the receipt, I found it only bore the date of the day of Brian's death, and doubtless the elation at this had made him remiss in demanding the letters that he had very likely forgotten all about.

To make a long story short, when the Nevilles and I left Southcove, Miss Neville was engaged to be my wife; and, though we considered it very wrong, we never told Mr. Neville to the day of his death that Brian's son, not Hilda's, would inherit Neville Court. Yet old Mrs. Neville, living still in her old house, hardly knows which of the boys she prefers; while she finds in Brian's widow the kind companion and loving child she requires so badly, and that Hilda's duties at Westwood Grange could hardly allow her to be. Hilda and I often talk about Brian's promise to visit this earth again; and though, of course, I have never set eyes on him, at times I cannot help thinking that some mysterious influence was at work to constitute Hilda and myself next-door neighbours at Southcove.

Mrs. Panton.

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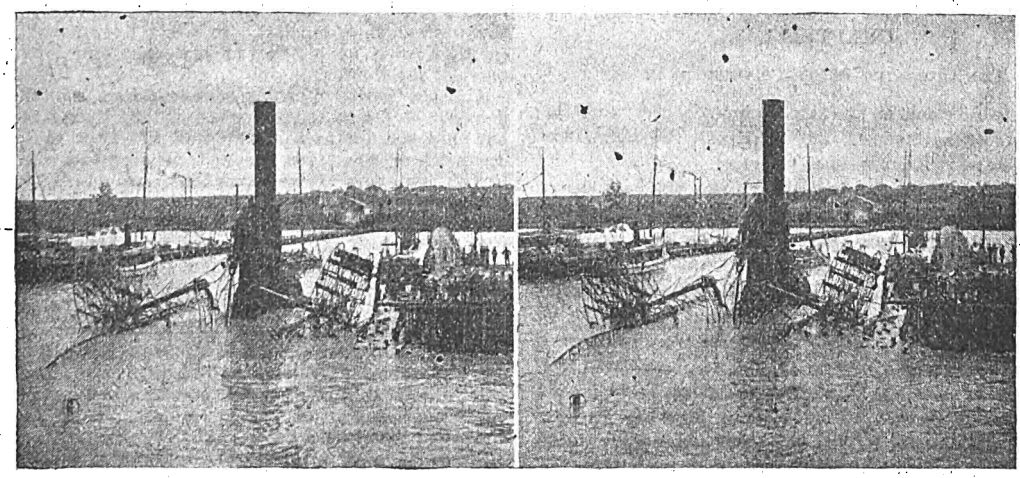
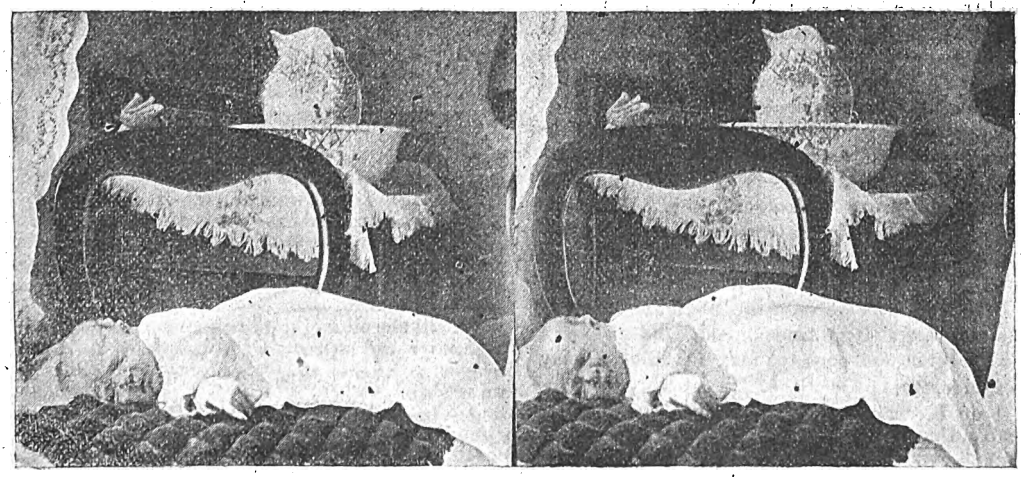
. Our Stereoscopic Gallery. .

The Old Mill, Lydford.



Coast Steamer Destroyed by American Navy, Cuba.



The Sleeping Beauty.

To be cut out and looked at through a stereoscope, which can be supplied by *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., for 2s., post free.

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This Serial Starts To-day.

THE FATE OF MICHAEL STANDRIDGE

By HEADON HILL.

Author of: "The Peril of the Prince," "Seaward for the Foe," "Guilty Gold," etc.

CHAPTER I.

The Creaking of the Cabin Door.

It was two o'clock on a calm summer night, and the steamship *Trojan*, homeward bound from the Cape, was nearing the end of a prosperous voyage.

This was the last unbroken night's rest the passengers were likely to have on board, for at about the same hour on the following night the vessel would be due to reach Southampton water.

Between decks all was hushed in the stillness of sleep; the hum of the distant engines and the steady pulsing of the screw were the only sounds that broke the silence, save the occasional footfall of the watch above. Mark well how these things happen. If this last night at sea had chanced to be what sailors call "dirty"—when crockery clatters, timbers groan, and doors bang naturally—this story would have ended, sharply and rudely, in the next ten minutes.

A solitary swing lamp left burning in the deserted saloon shed its feeble rays upon the closed doors of two rows of state-rooms, one on either side. In the upper berth of the sternmost cabin on the starboard side a man was sleeping, but the lower berth was empty, for the sleeper had paid the extra fee for the privilege of exclusiveness.

It was a seamed and weather-beaten face that lay on the pillow—a face whose deep trenched lines and rich mahogany tan told of toil and hardship—it might even be of vagabondage—under many a changeful sky. One hand lay scarred and sinewy upon the coverlet, but the other—the right hand—was thrust under the pillow in an attitude suggestive less of luxurious ease than of a soldier laying to his arms. The swell and curve of the bedclothes denoted that the sleeper was a large-framed man, and of such a height that the berth was none too long for him. He lay upon his left side, facing the door of the cabin.

He had been breathing with the steady regularity of sound slumber, but suddenly there came a slight catch, scarcely long enough to be called a pause in the clockwork respirations, and at the same moment the hand which was under the pillow shifted its position by just a hairsbreadth. There was a quiver, too, in the eyelids for about the tenth part of a second, and then the steady breathing went on as before, keeping time to the throb of the main shaft and the wash of the propeller. It would have been a delicate ear that could have detected any other sound in the dead quiet of the summer night.

And yet there had been a sound—a sound so trifling that it might well have passed unheeded by the most wakeful, but loud enough to have startled the keen senses of the occupant of the stern cabin from slumber, and to have braced his every nerve to vigilant tension. When a man has passed twenty years of his life in mining camps, he wakes easily, and this one was waiting the turn of events with a revolver in his grip, and eyes, half-unveiled, that struggled to pierce the gloom.

Five minutes passed, and there was no sound in the neighbourhood of the cabin save the somnolent breathing of him who lay in the upper berth. Before the expiration of the sixth th enoise that had awakened him fell gently and not unharmoniously upon the listening ears again. It was the faintest, slightest possible creaking in the hinge of the cabin door, which of itself, perhaps, would have meant little had it not been accompanied by the appearance of a slender thread of yellow light on the wall just inside the doorway.

The steady breathing continued, but the watcher had withdrawn his hand from the pillow now. The thread of light broadened into a ribbon, and the ribbon into a good-sized band, and then, as the door opened slowly, and, inch by inch, wider stil', the diffused light from the saloon lamp entered the cabin with sufficient strength to show four lithe fingers clasped on the edge of the door.

At this point the door creaked again, and the fingers were withdrawn, not to be replaced. But after quite a long interval a rounded shadow began to encroach on the band of light on the wall, and a human head was protruded stealthily into the cabin. The head contained two gleaming eyes, which sparkled in the obscurity, and it was followed—still with the same furtive gliding motion—by a pair of lean shoulders, which came stooping and stealing round the angle of the door.

Not till the midnight prowler was well inside and creeping nearer and nearer to the bedplace, did the supposed sleeper cease his stertorous breathing or give sign of wakefulness. Then, with a quick jerk of his whole body, he sat up in the berth; the faint light through the open door glinted along his pistol in a straight line with the intruder's chest, and a pleasant voice, said, very quietly:

"I've got the drop on you. A step further and I shall pull the trigger."

The shadowy form stopped as quickly as though the pistol itself had spoken.

"Why, Michael," it stammered, in harsh tones that tried

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to wheedle, "then you are awake and living after all. For goodness' sake put that thing down. It is only brother Simon, come to see if you are right and comfortable. I had a dream that you were in danger, Michael—that is what brought me here."

There must have been some false note in the excuse despite the profession of kinship, for never for an instant did the pistol waver from its line. The identity of his visitor seemed, if anything, to increase the vigilance of the man in the upper berth.

Keeping the weapon levelled and his eyes on the intruder, he found, with his left hand, a box of matches, and contrived to deftly light a candle-lamp that hung at the side of the bunk. This done, he lowered the pistol with apparent carelessness to his lap, as though the occasion for alarm were past, but the black muzzle among the bed-clothes kept the same direction, and the rugged forefinger still played ominously with the trigger guard.

"Sit ye down, Simon, on yonder chest," said the rightful occupant of the cabin; "I'd like to have a crack with you now you're here. This is the second time in six months you've shown anxiety about my welfare in the night time—the second time you've paid me a visit between twilight and dawn, without sending in your card, so to speak. Are you quite sure in your own mind, Simon, that it isn't the 'Kimberley Elephant' you're so dead set on, rather than Michael Standridge?"

The other man turned and seated himself on the chest, taking the opportunity as he did so to slip something keen and bright from his sleeve to the pocket of his coat, for he was fully dressed.

The muzzle of the pistol in the berth moved idly round and covered him in his new position. There was light enough in the cabin now to show up the startling contrast between the two men. He who called himself Michael Standridge was a finely-built, square-shouldered giant, looking hardened rather than battered by the obvious roughness of his tussle with the world. The sunburned tan which browned his broad, strongly-marked features and great gnarled hands was all in keeping with his muscular development.

The owner of the lithe fingers and stooping shoulders was cast in a different mould. Though some years younger, he would have struck the casual observer as the older of the two. He was of the city type, and looked as if his habits, whatever they may have been, had agreed with him as ill as the fresh air had benefited the other.

Altogether he was a mean and unwholesome-looking individual; and yet the fidelity with which that pistol followed his every movement suggested that he might possess qualities better understood than appreciated by the big man who watched him.

"Now, I will just put the case to you clearly, Simon," proceeded Michael Standridge, when the other was seated; "and as you were once a clerk in a lawyer's office—a police-court lawyer's, at that—you will be able to reckon it up and see what kind of a conclusion any reasonable body of men—say a jury—would come to after what has happened twice in the last six months."

"From the way you keep fooling about with that pistol I should say you suspected *me*, your own brother, of something crooked," interrupted the other. "I had a stupid dream that frightened me, I do assure you, Michael. I don't set up for being a saint, and I allow that I take a little personal interest in the 'Elephant,' as your lawful next-of-kin, you see, but as to harming you, you ought to know me better than that, Michael."

"I know you pretty well, Simon," responded the other dryly, "and I know that since you chose to join me at Kimberley I have had to watch myself closer than ever I did in the Black Hills of Dakota, with the Sioux whooping around for my scalp; ay, and closer than in the rowdiest saloon in the newest mining camp that ever held the scum of creation. But," he went on, dropping the touch of irony, "I admit nothing. I do not admit that I have the

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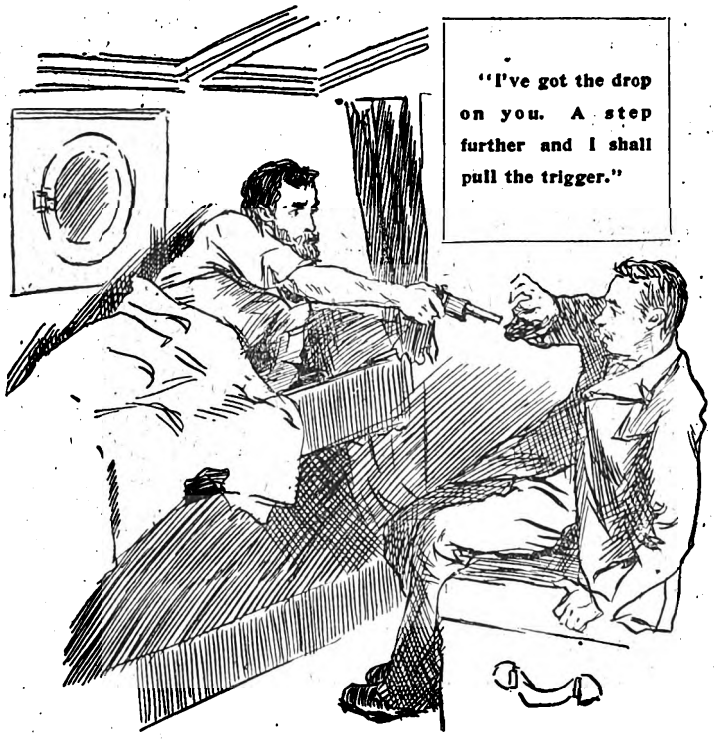
'Elephant' with me, and least of all do I admit that you are my next-of-kin, or have reason to take an interest in the stone. It is true that my poor mother elected, to her cost, to marry a blackguard, instead of remaining a widow; but because you are the offspring of that union it doesn't make you my brother, Simon Hoathley."

"I didn't expect this of you" he said. "How do matters stand between us, then?"

"I was coming to that," proceeded the elder man. "This is how the facts lay, I take it. After wandering up and down the earth for twenty years I fetch up at Kimberley Diamond Fields. I have bad luck at first, and I mention it in a letter I have occasion to write to Simon Hoathley, but he is not so keen on playing brother to an unlucky miner, and he doesn't trouble to reply. A year passes and I have a stroke of fortune—so great that it is the talk of the Colony. I find a stone of such size and brilliancy that the



"I've got the drop on you. A step further and I shall pull the trigger."

diamond is called the 'Kimberley Elephant,' and the newspapers get hold of the facts and print them. The *Cape Argus* goes a step further and publishes the name of the finder. This is copied into the English papers, and what happens then? Why, Simon Hoathley turns up at the diggings, professing ignorance at the lucky find, and only actuated in taking his long journey by a desire to clasp his 'dear brother's' hand again. He begs to be taken into partnership, and being an easy going chap, I allow him to share the claim without asking for references of character. If I had done so—I find later from a digger who knew something of him in London—I should have heard that Simon had been in jail for embezzling his employers' fees."

"Oh, you heard that, did you?" said the other. "Well, go on, it was a false charge."

"Of course," said Michael, "they always are. But previous convictions weigh with judges all the same. I shouldn't have thought so much about that, however, if it hadn't been for what followed. Simon being a bit of a lawyer, I allow him, at his own request, to draw up a bit of a partnership deed between us. He brings it to me to sign, and says as it's only formal, there's no need for me to read all the jargon through; but not being one to put my name to what I haven't knowledge of, I take the liberty of reading the document, and find that my affectionate kinsman has put the date of the partnership back a year so as to cover the 'Elephant.' I don't make any fuss, but I tear up that deed, and carry on without any lawyer's tomfoolery. Simon has a fair half of what we get, but that doesn't amount to much, as, barring the 'Elephant,' the claim was never a lucky one.

"I decide to go home to England and settle down, and Simon elects to come along too. I pay his passage, so that he may have what little he has got to keep him afloat till something crops up. The day before we sail we put up at a hotel at Capetown, and I am awakened in the middle of the night by a noise in my bedroom—much the same as I was awakened just now. I see the figure of a man going through the pockets of my clothes and searching here, there, and everywhere. Then the figure begins to come towards the bed, creeping and crawling, and the moonlight makes something glitter in his hand. I leap from the bed and catch at him, but the man trips me up and runs from the room. In the morning I discover a carpet slipper on the floor, which I recognise as belonging to Simon."

"Oh, Michael, Michael!" interrupted the visitor, "why didn't you mention all this before? It can be so easily explained. I swear I didn't enter your room. I must have left the slipper the evening before, when, as you will remember, I came in to say good-night."

"I repeat that I bring no charges," proceeded Michael. "I only put the case to you straight—what would a man in my position, who sets store by his night's rest, do under these circumstances? I take it that his course is plain. At the first chance he parts company with the disturbing element, and I don't mind saying that you are a disturbing element to me, Simon Hoathley."

"You mean, I suppose, that I am to be cast off when we reach Southampton?" was the reply.

"I mean that it will be better for my health, and possibly better for yours, if we each go our separate ways after to-morrow," said Michael. "There is no casting off in the matter. I never asked you to join me, and you have had more than a fair divide of what was got in partnership. You must have close on £300 worth of diamonds—quite enough to keep you afloat for the present. Twice have I been disturbed—remember, the third time may be fatal!"

Simon Hoathley sidled off the chest towards the door, his eye following his half-brother's still persistent pistol. He had listened with a certain air of downtrodden humility while Michael was stating his case. In his last words, spoken as he squirmed out of the cabin, there was nothing out of keeping with his virtuous and deprecatory attitude.

"Yes, my dear brother," he said, "I will not forget. The third time would be fatal, I think you hinted. Very well, so be it, and good-night."

CHAPTER II.

Blinding the Trail.

Left alone again, Michael Standridge lay still in the berth, all his faculties keenly alert, but relaxed so far that

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ASTHMA

WHY is it generally thought that there is no cure for

ASTHMA,

CHRONIC BRONCHITIS, Shortness of Breath, BLOOD SPITTING, etc.?

BECAUSE the usual treatments only confine themselves to combating single symptoms instead of attacking the root of the disease.

BE SURE THERE IS ONE

ABSOLUTE LASTING CURE

Sufferers will receive, post free, FREE OF CHARGE, particulars of the famous WEIDHAAS HOME-TREATMENT when applying to THE PAUL WEIDHAAS' HYGIENIC INSTITUTE, 16 T.A. Buckingham Road, Brighton.

Mr. Weidhaas has tried the treatment on himself, after having been given up as incurable, and cured himself, and had then practised it for over 19 years in many thousands of Special Cases. Many having suffered for over 40 years have been cured by his treatment (in some instances even at the age of 70 or 80 years), after having been GIVEN UP AS INCURABLE. No interference with daily occupation. Send description of complaint, and mention if you suffer from COLD FEET.

Mr. J. POMFREY. (From a photo.)

Read the following testimonial, one out of scores received:

Chronic Asthma and Bronchitis combined with Indigestion (after 15 Years' Standing) Cured.

"I am pleased to inform you that I am now restored to good health since being under your treatment. I used to feel tired of life almost. My breath was so short, and my cough so bad, I used to get up in the night, for I used to feel that I should be choked. I used to suffer with indigestion very bad, and could not keep my food down, and used to keep coughing and retching in the morning. I could not take any breakfast, but I can now get a good night's sleep, and eat a good meal without any of the distressing symptoms, thanks to your Treatment.

"JESSE POMFREY, Warwick."

(Full address on application.)

THE DIRECTOR is prepared to pay £1,000 to any Charitable Institution if the above is not a genuine extract from patient's own letter. The original may be seen at the Paul Weidhaas Hygienic Institute by any bona fide enquirers.

CURABLE

Shilling packets

Kaputine "the" safe Remedy for Headache

WARNING. *Instead of using the common White Headache Powders, which generally consist entirely of a crude drug, which has been condemned as dangerous by the medical papers, insist on having a bona-fide anti-quack remedy, recommended by such eminent medical authorities as Dr. RAMAGE, L.R.C.P., Dr. THURSTIN, L.R.C.P., late Dr. BOYD-WILLIAMS (Liverpool), the Editor of the Medical Journal, "Health," etc., etc. The name of this safe remedy is KAPUTINE.*

ALL LEADING CHEMISTS SELL IT, OR CAN GET IT FOR YOU IN A FEW HOURS.

Sold by BOOT'S, TAYLOR'S, DAY'S, WHITE'S and other Stores. Most Co-operative Stores sell it.

PACKETS, 1/-. SAMPLES ONE PENNY,

or KAPUTINE LIMITED, HUDDERSFIELD, will send it FREE for 12 stamps.

WORTH A CROWN A DOSE.

Indigestion, and Low Spirits.

It is astonishing to what an extent we are all liable to occasional ailments. A mental trouble, pecuniary care, or food eaten in the wrong manner or at irregular periods, or food in itself indigestible, may, and often does, give us an "attack of the blues," a Bilious disorder, a disagreeable fit of Indigestion, or a Sick Headache. During these periods our energies and strength appear to wane away, so that we are loth to undertake the day's duties, and find difficulty in summoning sufficient resolution to carry them out. Besides which our Nerves are disorganised, and minor troubles, otherwise accounted "trifles light as air," cause us to fret and fume to a degree out of all proportion to their importance. Everything is, indeed, jaundiced to our view, so that we fear impending trouble, pecuniary losses; and we anticipate troubles for ourselves that, happily, are rarely realised.

As a remedy for these and other Stomachic and Liver ailments we know of no remedy so safe and effective as our old friend, Guy's Tonic, whose merits we have investigated and are fully able to endorse. Many of our readers keep this remedy by them, and take an occasional dose to prevent possible Digestive or Liver trouble. Minor ailments are best treated promptly with a proved remedy like Guy's Tonic, which affords immediate benefit and effects permanent good. In many instances that which is but a slight ailment may become a serious or a chronic disease. Guy's Tonic acts curatively and restoratively even in the more serious phases of Stomachic and Liver disorders. It is pleasant to take, skilfully prepared, and, as we have found out by personal enquiries, gives universal satisfaction to those who take it.

Nausea and Flatulence Removed.

Mr. W. Campbell Muir, of Inistrynich, Dalmally, N.B., writes:—

"For the last four months I have been suffering from Nausea, Flatulence, and Depression. Occasionally three days would pass without my having eaten solid food. I tried various remedies which did good for a day or two, but the effects were not permanent. I thought at last I would try Guy's Tonic, and with great pleasure I have to inform you that I had only taken half a bottle before my Appetite returned, the Flatulence disappeared, and I am now as well as ever."

A new size (Six-Ounce Bottle of Guy's Tonic, price 1s. 1½d., is now on Sale at all Chemists and Stores.

ESTABLISHED 1851.

BIRKBECK BANK.

Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, London.

2% on CURRENT ACCOUNTS, on the minimum monthly balances when not drawn below £100.

The BIRKBECK ALMANACK, with full particulars, post free.

FRANCIS RAVENSCROFT, *Manager.*

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he allowed himself to ponder deeply on the experience of the night.

"The third time's fatal," he muttered to himself. "I did not like the tone in which he assented to what I said. I meant it for a threat, but that sneaky, sneering voice seemed to turn the threat against myself. The next time may be fatal, but not to him, he was thinking, maybe. In that case, he intends to follow me when we land and try again. I don't value my own life much," his thoughts ran on, "except that before I go under I must find my little Marian, and hand over to her the proceeds of all these years of wandering and toil. Small enough they would have been had it not been for that lucky morning when my pick turned up the 'Elephant.' How its face seemed to smile at me in the sunshine as it peeped from the blue clay." And Michael put his hand under the pillow with a loving gesture that would have told tales had there been anyone there to see.

Then his mind ran back to the circumstances that had sent him adrift to the ends of the earth after three short years of wedded life. Michael Standridge came of honest yeoman's stock in Dorsetshire. His father had died while Michael was yet a boy, and his mother had shortly afterwards married James Hoathley, a scampish lawyer at Poole, whose main object in saddling himself with the widow had been to get possession of the snug homestead and farm that had been unreservedly left to her.

As might have been expected, the marriage turned out badly. James Hoathley quickly dissipated the greater part of the Standridges modest patrimony, and then drank himself rowdily out of the world, leaving his widow with an attenuated income and the additional burden of another child. The poor woman did the best she could with the two boys, and died of the struggle when Michael was twenty and Simon was eight. The latter was taken to London by an aunt of his father, and Michael, finding that there was absolutely nothing left after the remnants of his mother's property had been realised and her debts paid, set about earning his living by the first means that came to hand, which chanced to be brick-making.

Michael was just four-and-twenty when he met the woman who eventually proved his undoing—an assistant in a milliner's shop at Dorchester, near which town he worked.

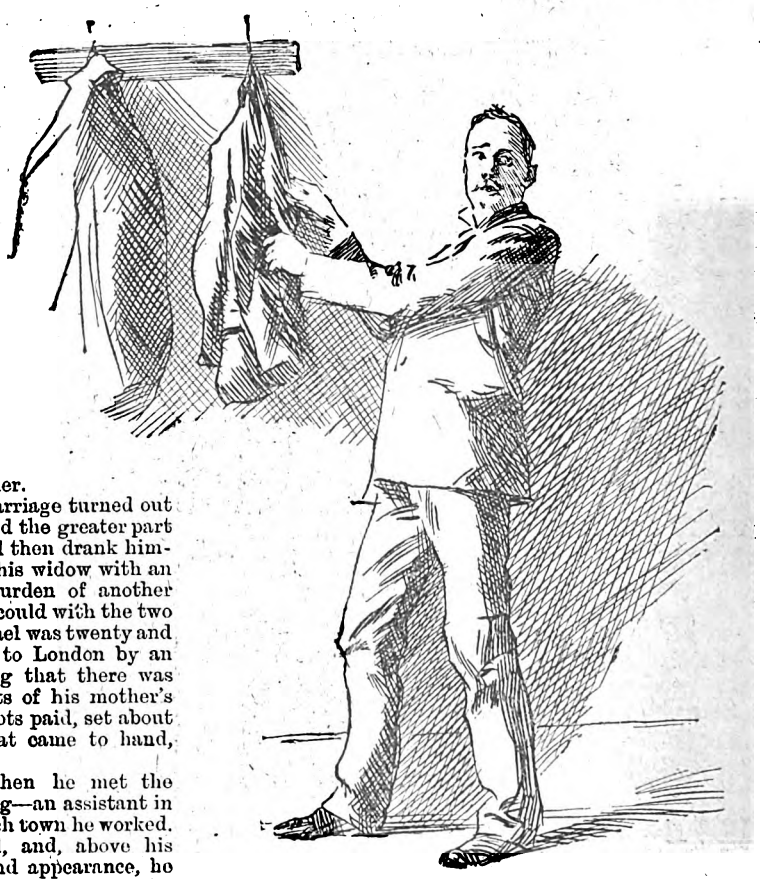
She was a pretty, empty-headed girl, and, above his station though Michael was in speech and appearance, he had some difficulty in getting her to listen to a man who toiled for weekly wages in a brickfield. But the young fellow was as determined in his wooing as in other things, and a summer's courtship ended in a marriage between the ill-assorted pair. Michael had saved enough to make a comfortable little home, and for the first two years and more all went well.

A girl child was born, and Mrs. Standridge, though occasionally plaintive about her fall in the "social scale," did her duty fairly well by her husband.

Then suddenly, two years after the baby's birth, things went all wrong in the cottage. Household affairs were neglected, little Marian grew thin and fretful, and several times when Michael came home from work he had to wait outside his own door till Mrs. Standridge returned, flushed and cross, from an expedition to the town. Michael bore it all patiently for some time, and then on the very evening when he had intended to speak his mind, he found his house door open, his wife and child gone, and a note on the table to the effect that he had looked his last on both of them.

As usual on these occasions, the neighbours knew a good deal more than the wronged husband. It came like a thunderbolt upon Michael to hear now for the first time allusions to a "strange gentleman" with whom his wife's flight was popularly coupled. This person had been staying at the hotel in the town as a summer visitor, and hasty inquiries showed that he had not only been often seen in the neighbourhood of the cottage, but had given up his rooms at the hotel on the day of Mrs. Standridge's flight.

Having exhausted all the means of search in his power,



The signalman was too astonished to speak.
[See next week's instalment.]

the bereaved man turned his back on his desolate home and sailed for America, where for years he led a wandering life amid the wild scenes of the frontier. Thence he made his way to the Cape, and finally to the Kimberley diamond fields, where fortune, quickly followed by Simon, came to him.

Since they parted at their mother's graveside Michael had only written two letters to his half-brother, the first to briefly announce his departure from England, and the second, written after many years, and destined to be unanswered, to tell of his arrival at Kimberley, and of the persistent ill luck that had so far befallen him. As boys there had been no love lost between the two, and Michael, never having apprised Simon Hoathley of his marriage, believed him to be in ignorance of it.

(To be continued.)

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We don't ask you to buy A pig in a poke.

Many people object to buying articles through the medium of a newspaper advertisement because, as they say, they don't know what they are getting for their money—they may be "buying a pig in a poke," as the old phrase runs. To some extent these people have wisdom on their side. A great many things have been put on the market by means of attractive advertisements which certainly on closer examination have failed to come up to the flattering expectations the printed descriptions have raised. Advertisers who resort to these devices not only injure their own business but, by reflex action, the business of honest people who are anxious to deal fairly, but who from association fall under the odium of suspicion. Though we think the name of "Chambers," backed up by that of the *Daily Express* should be sufficient guarantee to anyone of the *bona fides* of any book offer, yet we recognise that there are people who would still prefer to make quite sure by ocular proof. We wish to meet such people quite frankly, and to give them the proof they ask for, because we are quite sure that when they have gone fully into the circumstances they will be perfectly satisfied that every word we have said is true.

CHAMBERS'S ENCYCLOPÆDIA

To the General Manager,
Daily Express, Tudor Street, E.C.
Please send me an illustrated prospectus giving specimen pages of the new Encyclopædia, Chambers's Twentieth Century Issue, together with full particulars of the *Daily Express* special offer in connection therewith.
Name .....
Address .....
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TWENTIETH CENTURY EDITION

is not a reprint of an old edition printed off antiquated plates, but is in every sense a new, original, and up-to-date work. Every article appearing in the Twentieth Century Issue has been revised or re-written up to the early days of the present year, and there is not a single reference in the entire thirty thousand articles which will be found old or out-of-date. That is a very bold statement, which we could not possibly make if it were untrue; but we say it unhesitatingly, and challenge anyone to deny it. We insist upon this point strongly, because other encyclopædias described as "new" have been put on the market, and purchasers have subsequently discovered that so far from being new the works in question are so old as to be completely valueless. What we want you to do is to verify our words for yourselves. You can do this by applying to any leading bookseller, who probably has a copy of the new issue on exhibition, or, if this is inconvenient, by sending us the subjoined inquiry form filled up with your name and address, and upon receipt of it we will send you by return an illustrated prospectus of Chambers's Encyclopædia (Twentieth Century Issue), which will conclusively prove to your eyes that the Encyclopædia offered on such exceptional terms by the *Daily Express* is really a genuine bargain, and is not a specious reprint that would be dear at any price. We cannot make you a fairer offer than that. Don't put it off until you have forgotten it, or until the *Daily Express* special offer is withdrawn. Drop into a leading bookseller's to-day, or else, if you prefer it, tear out at once and send us the subjoined inquiry form. It will cost you a halfpenny in money and about two minutes in time, and in return you will have full particulars of the greatest book offer ever made to the public.

You want to have proofs and we Want you to have proofs.

The 20th Century Chambers' has neither peer nor competitor, for all other encyclopædias are made on an old and cumbersome plan. The 20th Century Chambers' alone meets the requirements of the man of this day and age. It is exhaustive, yet condensed; its information is universal, yet readily accessible; it is made for the busy and practical man of to-day, who wants complete and exact information, but is unwilling to run over a 30-page article, when the same facts can be condensed perhaps into a single page, column, or paragraph, as in Chambers'.

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

My distinct duty this week is first of all to point out to you the fact that a new serial story begins on page 474. You would probably discover this for yourselves, but I prefer not to take any risks. Mr. Headon Hill's story is a first-class one, and I am quite sure you will enjoy its perusal.

When this number is published a good many of you will still be away holiday-making. Well, I trust your Easter vacation will be an enjoyable one. At the moment of writing the weather does not look altogether propitious. The snow-flakes, indeed, are flecking the window panes, and the air of Henrietta Street makes one think that an army of old women have been "picking geese," as we used to be told when children. Really, the calendar has to be consulted to prove that it is Easter and not Christmas time. Sometimes I wonder if the scientists have not miscalculated time, and whether the seasons are slipping round into one another's places.

Talking of holidays, I often find myself asking why people flock to the seaside always. A sniff of the briny is grateful to the "town" man, I know, but there are hundreds of inland spots where the air is pure, and where the tinge of brown or red may be wooed back to the faded cheek at a far smaller cost than at the seaside. There's many an honest villager anxious to let his cottage for less than the rent of a single room at the average watering-place. And the absolute quiet which an inland place affords is far more beneficial to the jaded City man or woman than the bustle and bank-holiday atmosphere of many coast towns. Many is the happy hour I've spent basking in some secluded hollow among the Sussex Downs, staring vacantly at the sun-kissed woods, with not a sound save the gentle hum of insects, and—B-r-r-r-r, atishoo! Here am I talking of basking in the sun, with nothing in the air but snow-flakes. Make up the fire, Sebastian (Sebastian is the office-boy), and do keep that door shut.

With the questions of national defence and commercial supremacy in the air, it seems strange that a man wishing to become a sailor, should find it difficult to do so. Nevertheless, a correspondent, "Tall," finds it by no means easy. Acting on my advice, given a week to two ago, he has written to some of the leading steamship companies, but they reply that they only want experienced hands. But, as "Tall" remarks, "Surely they cannot *all* be experienced sailors. They must have new hands sometimes." Which certainly sounds convincing enough.

The only further advice I can give my correspondent is, that he should hie him to the nearest sea-port, and personally apply to any skippers or owners he may encounter. The life of an inexperienced seaman is not quite a bed of roses, but I have no doubt "Tall" has considered all that.

Here is a pleasant letter from "Miss A. N.":

"The new wrapper of *Short Stories* is a decided improvement. You are introduced to a person; he is very plain—indeed, you are almost repelled by reason of his unattractiveness—he smiles, and lo! his face is transformed! you want to see more of him (take that to heart, Mr. Editor, the advice is gratis).

"I am an old, but not a constant, reader of *Short Stories*. *P.W.* is the paper we have always taken. The other day I was turning over a pile of newspapers, and came across an aged number of *P.W.* I believe it was one of the first numbers that Pearsons published.

"I think I am down in your bad books, for I have never yet won a prize in *Short Stories*; but I shall keep on trying until my luck turns. When I see my name in print, I am so vain that I buy several numbers of the discriminating paper and distribute them among my friends.

"The latter clause is not meant as bribery, Mr. Editor, but you must know one takes a fatherly interest in a paper in which one's own work or name has appeared."

You must keep on, "Miss A. N.," and doubtless you will succeed in winning a prize. Why not try the effect of becoming a *constant*, instead of merely an occasional, reader?

"E. B. H."—An answer to your question appeared some months ago in *Pearson's Weekly*. I reprint it for your benefit:

Strategy has been variously called "the art of generals," the "art of making war on the map," and that "art of directing rightly masses of troops towards the object of the campaign"; while tactics consists in the "employment and manœuvring of troops in the presence of, or in contact with, the enemy." Thus tactics is subsidiary to strategy. Strategy has a place in the absence of the enemy, while tactics has not. "Strategy merges into tactics when the enemy comes within striking distance," and the latter has sometimes been called the "strategy of the battlefield." Lord Wolseley, in the Soldier's Pocket-Book, points out that "strategy is a constant science; its rules are similar to those in the time of Cæsar. Tactics is an art that varies with the spread of civilisation. Most great inventions so bear upon the armament, equipment and conveyance of troops, that the tactics of armies have to be frequently remodelled in consequence."

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 4,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

SHORT STORIES ADVERTISEMENT RATES.

Single column, per inch, per insertion	£0 10 0
Double ,, ,,	1 0 0
Full page inside, facing page of matter, either white paper or 2nd or 3rd page of cover, or back page, per insertion	10 0 0
Half-page ,, ,,	5 0 0
Quarter-page ,, ,,	2 10 0
Eighth-page ,, ,,	1 5 0

All spaces above one-eighth of a page are charged at per page rate.

Series discount: 5 per cent. for 13, 10 per cent. for 26, 15 per cent. for 52 insertions.

Black blocks are charged 25 per cent. extra. All advertisements are subject to approval. All copy must be sent in by Noon on **Tuesday, April 16th**, if intended for the issue on sale **April 30th**, and dated **May 4th**. The Proprietors reserve the right to hold over or suspend the insertion of any advertisement without prejudice to other insertions on order. All communications should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, "Pearson's Weekly" Offices, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Printed by Horace Cox, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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MR. GEORGE R. SIMS

Tells the Story of his Famous Discovery for the Hair,

"TATCHO."

In the *Referee* Mr. George R. Sims, the famous poet and dramatist, journalist and playwright, and the writer of "Mustard and Cress" over the signature of "Dagonet," recently explained to a wondering public that he had to a band of philanthropic millionaires made over his rights in the new discovery, the hair-grower "Tatcho."

Some considerable curiosity having been aroused by the pronouncement on the subject, a representative of the *Westminster Gazette* called upon him to inquire if the statement was to be taken seriously or with a grain of salt—a condiment not at all out of place in connection with "Mustard and Cress." "Oh, yes," said Mr. Sims, "it is quite true. I have been supplying the public with a hair restorer gratuitously, but the correspondence on the subject has lately grown so vast that I am quite unable to deal with it. As correspondence continued to pour in upon me, I at last determined to hand the recipe over to a syndicate who would make it up and supply the public with it. This I have done, and that is the story of the 'George R. Sims Hair Renewer.'" But you call it 'Tatcho,' Mr. Sims," said the representative. "Yes, that is a Romany word signifying genuine."

IS YOUR HAIR

weak, thin, or falling? If so you should give a trial to "Tatcho." You are invited to try it on exceedingly favourable and even generous terms, the George R. Sims Co. having decided to distribute a quantity of large trial bottles of "Tatcho" to enable those who have not yet profited by Mr. Sims' discovery to do so. They do this in the belief that such distribution will enable the preparation to become more widely known, and will introduce it to every home in a more satisfactory manner than could be effected through an extravagant outlay in advertising. Anyone sending 1s. 10d. will receive a bottle post free, and the use of this bottle will prove beyond possibility of doubt that there is no hair-renewer known to science to-day equal to "Tatcho." A sample bottle will convince you of this fact.

"Tatcho" is a brilliant, spirituous tonic, the colour of whisky, free from all grease. It is not a dye, and contains no colouring matter.

If you value your appearance—and who does not?—get a bottle of "Tatcho" to-day. It acts as an invigorating tonic. It stops the hair falling, creates a luxuriant growth, and imparts to it a bright and youthful lustre.

Readers of SHORT STORIES may avail themselves of this offer by cutting off the corner of this advertisement and sending it to the offices of George R. Sims Co., 81c Great Queen Street, Holborn, London, W.C. together with Postal Order 1/10. Addresses should be legibly written.

GEO. R. SIMS CO.,

81c GREAT QUEEN STREET, LONDON, W.C.

"TATCHO" is sold by Hairdressers, Chemists, and Stores throughout the world in bottles at **1s., 2s. 9d.,** and **5s.**

Mr. GEO. R. SIMS' HAIR RENEWER.

4/6

LARGE TRIAL BOTTLE

1/10

POST FREE.

COUPON.

S.S. 1901.

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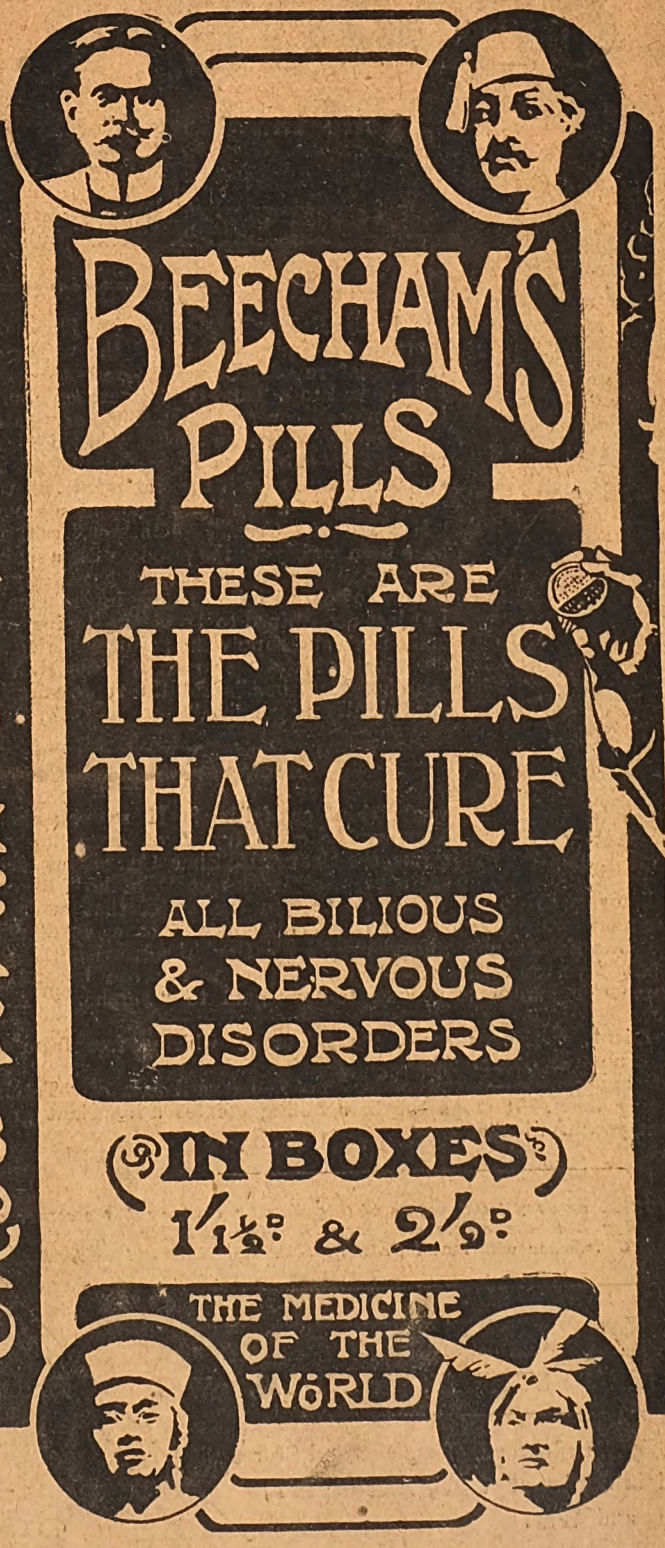

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No. 642.) For Week Ending April 20th, 1901. (One Penny.

PEARSON'S SHORT STORIES

A Weekly Magazine for Home and Train

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KAPUTINE

The Best & Safest Remedy for

HEADACHE.

NURSE HILL, of the London Association of Nurses, writes:

"I have seen Kaputine administered to many patients, and can truly say it is a remedy which should have a place in every household."

All Leading Chemists sell KAPUTINE, 1/-. Samples One Penny.

If your Chemist has not KAPUTINE send his name and address to KAPUTINE, HUDDERSFIELD, and we will send you a SHILLING PACKET FREE.

WORTH A CROWN A DOSE.

COUNT THE PROFIT

and you will find that after purchasing your Watches, Jewellery, &c., direct from H. SAMUEL you have effected a saving of nearly FIFTY PER CENT. on ordinary shop prices. H. SAMUEL'S SAFE CASH SYSTEM enables you to **preserve your integrity** and avoid debt inviting Instalment Systems and ensures for you the highest possible value at lowest possible cost. All this is explained in

H. SAMUEL'S BARGAIN BOOK 25/-

Nearly **200** pages, adorned with over **3,000** illustrations and descriptions of **Gold** and **Silver Watches, Jewellery, Diamonds, Plate, Cutlery,** etc., etc.

FREE BONUS REWARDS

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 642.] For the Week Ending April 20th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Being Days in the Professional Life of the late Mr. Hugo Pontifex, the Famous West-end Solicitor.

To those who had only met him casually in Society, the late Mr. Pontifex was a good-tempered mystery. Bluff, handsome, and, in spite of his middle-age, a little of a dandy, he seemed the last man in the world to deserve his reputation, which was that of the keenest, most audacious, and unerring of family lawyers. Fair-haired, and powerful as an athlete, his striking appearance was increased by his eyes, one of which was grey and one blue.

In reality, however, Hugo Pontifex had a wide and almost exclusively aristocratic practice. He seldom briefed a barrister, seldom set foot in a court of justice, but single handed he hunted down, captured, and safely buried mystery after mystery of terrible import to Mayfair and Belgravia.

An expert in strangling scandal, he lived a life of enthralling interest, and died a rich man. When his executors went through his papers they found nothing to satisfy their curiosity, though plenty to excite it. Hugo Pontifex knew the value of fire—and the dangers of ink. But from time to time he related to the writer, who enjoyed a certain measure of his confidence, the incidents which form the basis of the following stories. In speaking of these strange fragments of drama, Mr. Pontifex himself employed fictitious names, the present author being left to guess vainly at the identity of the genuine actors.

THE LITTLE DOOR IN BERKELEY STREET.

WHENEVER, during the later years of his remarkable professional career, Mr. Pontifex happened to be in the neighbourhood of Berkeley Square, it was his custom to leave it by Berkeley Street.

And, as he passed down that well-known thoroughfare, a grim smile would flit across his shrewd features at the sight of a low door in a narrow area. The area skirted a small but luxurious town-house—the London residence of Lady Frances Boden, and the modest portal in question gave admission to a neat kitchen and servants' hall. This little door in Berkeley Street was connected with Mr. Pontifex's smile by a curious history.

One tempestuous day near the end of a bleak January, which had plagued the Metropolis with a succession of snow-storms, there was brought to Hugo Pontifex, at his offices in St. James', a scrawled note in a thick and scented envelope.

A District Messenger Boy delivered this into the lawyer's own hands.

"I was to bring it right to you, sir," he explained apologetically, "her ladyship made me promise her I would. And if you wished to reply, sir, I am to take the answer back, myself."

The solicitor signed for the missive and investigated its contents. They proved to be short and in the third person.

> Will Mr. Pontifex pray come at once to Berkeley Street to see Lady Frances Boden. She is in much distress and perplexity.

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Hugo Pontifex treated the bearer to a generous tip. The lad had insisted upon interviewing the great lawyer personally, and Mr. Pontifex liked that rare quality, obedience to orders.

"You will not need to return to Berkeley Street," he added. "I shall be with Lady Frances in a few moments."

The boy saluted smartly and took his departure. Mr. Pontifex, donning an immaculate "silk" and a big fur-lined overcoat, followed him out.

The gloomy afternoon air was full of dancing flakes; by the time the solicitor had reached his destination another snow-fall had set in.

Touching the bell of the dainty residence to whose hitherto unknown tenant he had been so hastily called, he noticed that the shutters obscured most of its front windows, a circumstance which suggested that the tenants were from home, or had but recently arrived in town. Also, while awaiting a response to his summons, Mr. Pontifex remarked that a burly police-constable, planted on the adjacent pavement, had begun to observe him with unmistakable deliberation.

A second afterwards, the lawyer was glancing over the threshold, not at the usual trim parlour-maid, but at an elderly woman clad in the stiff dark gown of a responsible domestic.

Mr. Pontifex gave her his card. She whispered mysteriously with some invisible companion and concluded by asking him to enter. The solicitor acted upon the invitation. Once inside, he found himself face to

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face with a strapping young fellow in extremely correct mourning attire.

"Excuse my spying on you," begged this person, cheerfully, "but I never knew how useful a letter-box slit was before, I unscrewed the case last night—my own idea! Awfully glad you've looked round—we're in a dickens of a mess. I'm Appleton, Captain in the Grenadiers, and a friend of the—of the family; Lady Frances is upstairs in her boudoir."

Mr. Pontifex gravely acknowledged the introduction and allowed himself to be guided to an upper story. Here, in a cosy apartment with drawn blinds and electric pendants ablaze, he encountered the author of that note, which had so urgently requested his presence. She was a typical Society dame, exquisitely dressed and still handsome, but, for the present, dissolved in tears. With her was a pretty girl, apparently of twenty summers or thereabouts, whose soft cheeks bore the traces of recent weeping.

His new and nervous client was calmed by the cool self-possession of Hugh Pontifex.

"Lady Frances Boden," said Captain Appleton, indicating the elder of the two, "Lady Frances, this is Mr. Pontifex."

The lawyer greeted her politely; his new and nervous client was calmed by the cool self-possession of Hugo Pontifex.

"I have sent for you, Mr. Pontifex," she murmured, "on the recommendation of Captain Appleton—who has heard your powers of avoiding scandal most highly spoken of. If you can help us, please, please do—otherwise there is nothing for us but public disgrace."

"Perhaps," broke in the Captain, "I had better explain, Lady Frances." The gallant officer twisted a ferocious moustache and cleared his throat.

"The fact is, Mr. Pontifex," he confessed, "Mr. Boden—Mr. Percival Boden, Lady Frances' husband—has not, we are afraid, been running perfectly straight and has finished by getting the law upon his track. A trifling misunderstanding about an acceptance—unfortunately the gentleman whose name is on several discounted bills, alleges that he didn't place it there. Not to put too fine a point upon the matter, Mr. Pontifex, the police are trying to arrest Mr. Boden for—for forgery."

Lady Frances groaned, and the more youthful mourner choked over a sob.

"Don't cry, Carrie," muttered Captain Appleton, consolingly, "Mr. Pontifex will pull him through, I'll swear."

"My daughter and I were in the country when we first learnt of it," said Lady Frances, miserably, "and travelled up, to be on the spot, and, if necessary, obtain legal advice for Percival, who had been staying at his club. Of course we did our best to settle this without fuss, for my fortune is secured to me and Percival has not been able to squander that as he has his own. But a warrant had already been granted and we were powerless. We went to a hotel for a day or two—my servants all being in Hertfordshire, with the exception of a housekeeper and a kitchen-maid."

The Captain shrugged his shoulders and checked Lady Frances' flow of talk.

"The real trouble, Mr. Pontifex," he declared, "is simple but disconcerting—yesterday Lady Frances received word from her husband. He had contrived to gain a haven here. The housekeeper is a faithful soul, she kept the other servant in the dark and stowed Mr. Boden away. Unluckily, the police had traced him here and insisted on a search. Miss Boden sent for me and I was bound to warn her that resistance would be futile. She persuaded her mother to admit the detectives, though not until I had disposed, temporarily, of the individual they wanted. You might like to contemplate the device by which I cheated one smart inspector and three plain-clothes constables. That will afford you an opportunity of making Mr. Boden's acquaintance."

With an apology to Lady Frances he drew the lawyer from the room and led him to the garret floor of the compact dwelling.

In the wall of a cramped attic was a large and sombre closet. The Captain whistled peculiarly, strode into it, and lighted a match. Mr. Pontifex saw that it held a huge

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slate cistern. Upon a beam by the tank sat a dishevelled man, his linen dirty, his chin unshaven, his garments bedraggled.

"Mr. Boden," pursued Captain Appleton, genially, "Mr. Pontifex—Mr. Pontifex, Mr. Boden. Mr. Boden, Mr. Pontifex is a clever solicitor who will endeavour to arrange for your escape from that fate, which, I regret to believe, you have richly deserved."

Percival Boden growled an indistinguishable sentence, the Captain paid no attention, he was showing Mr. Pontifex that the cistern had been emptied of its usual contents.

"My idea," he said, "had it run dry, boosted him in, and not an owl of the lot guessed the trick. But, to be safe, I made Boden start the cock into a half-full bucket when they got this far, and the gurgle of the water sounded so natural they never suspected how near they were to their prey. Ha-ha!"

He led the solicitor away, laughing boyishly.

"Boden is a bad egg," he confessed frankly, "and I'm not a bit sorry for him. Indeed, I should be very glad to know that he was out of England, with the best of reasons for not setting foot on the old island again. I'm to marry Miss B., and though Lady Frances is a trump, Boden really has been rendering himself too notorious. I owe him a grudge myself, for all he is Carrie's father—he had the impudence to oppose our engagement—and it tickles me to keep him shut up in that loft. However, I'm certain the inspector wasn't satisfied, for a couple of constables have been posted back and front of the house. Any hour we might be subjected to a further domiciliary visit, and then B. would have to dive into his cistern again. He was a fool to come here!"

"Quite so," said Mr. Pontifex, stopping on a carpeted landing, "but may I inquire, Captain Appleton, why I have been consulted in this business. Would you have me become an accessory after the crime?"

"For Heaven's sake don't consider that," begged the Captain, "think of poor Lady Frances and of her daughter. How would they endure the shame of a trial? The bills shall be met to the last penny, I swear it, Mr. Pontifex. But Boden must be smuggled abroad. They say you are a genius in desperate straits such as these; tell me what to do with that rogue and forger under the roof there, and two women—to say nothing of Leonard Appleton—will bless you all their lives."

The solicitor sighed.

"You plead eloquently, Captain Appleton," he said, "very well, I will do as you wish, but, to be honest, it is purely for the sake of that pair blue eyes in Lady Frances' boudoir."

"I say, sir," cried the officer, "you are a brick! But what is to be the game. I admit myself stumped. If those bobbies were not glued to the only exits there are!"

Mr. Pontifex reflected, twisting his sapphire ring.

"How long," he inquired, "has the policeman in Berkeley Street been at his post?"

"Not more than a couple of hours," answered the Captain, "his predecessor was relieved about two o'clock. Carrie has been watching for any tokens of a fresh raid and so saw the change of sentries."

The lawyer peered through a convenient casement which lit the landing. Night was enfolding the Metropolis, the snow still descended. Hugo Pontifex smiled suddenly.

"Captain Appleton," he said, "I recollect that Lady Frances mentioned a housekeeper and a kitchen-maid as being on these premises. The former is in the secret, the latter, I gather, ignorant of it. She must be dispatched about some business that will detain her most of the evening. Kindly arrange this with Lady Frances while I instruct Miss Boden."

The inquisitive officer re-conducted him to the boudoir and motioned Lady Frances from the apartment. Mr. Pontifex sat himself down by the girl with the blue eyes.

"Miss Boden," he began, "I shall need your assistance

Percival Boden growled an indistinguishable sentence.

in a project which smacks more of the stage-manager than the lawyer. But never mind that. As soon as the kitchen-maid—whose absence Captain Appleton is procuring—has been packed off, you will please assume her character, and, in addition, one of her costumes. I am going into Piccadilly upon a slight errand; when I get back you shall be coached in your new *rôle*."

He picked up his hat, buttoned his coat and sallied forth into the storm. At a Piccadilly chemist's he made a purchase—a little white powder. His rooms were in the Albany, hard by; the assistant knew him.

On the solicitor's return he beheld the identical constable kicking his heels outside the area railing, a chilly and wretched being. Mr. Pontifex smiled grimly and vanished over the threshold at which the policeman stood guard. Nodding to the anxious housekeeper, the lawyer hurried upstairs and passed into the boudoir.

The girl with the blue eyes had performed his bidding

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to the letter. And a charming Phyllis she made, if a rather nervous one.

"What can you propose to do, Mr. Pontifex?" asked his bewildered client.

The solicitor pulled off his furred coat, threw down his hat, and started to unwrap the powder he had purchased from the Piccadilly chemist.

"May I trouble you for a piece of sugar, Lady Frances?" was all he would say.

The mock kitchen-maid fetched him a bowl full of the sparkling lumps. With his pen-knife, Mr. Pontifex dug a hole in the largest fragment he could discover and emptied the powder dexterously into it.

"Now, Miss Boden," he told her, "we are equipped. Do you imagine you can tempt that awkward policeman at the area railing to take an interest in hot whisky-and-water, sweetened—with that piece of sugar?"

"By Jove!" exclaimed the Captain, admiringly, "and then——?"

"We shall see," retorted Mr. Pontifex, "but tell Mr. Boden to wash himself, get into some inconspicuous sort of suit—the shabbiest he can rake up—and put what things he may want into a kit-bag."

"I will do that for him," said Lady Frances tearfully, "but I'm sure I don't in the least comprehend your scheme, Mr. Pontifex."

"It is not necessary that you should," asserted the lawyer, drily. "Miss Boden, will you pilot me to the basement? I shall require your aid also, Captain Appleton."

On their way to the lower portion of the house, Mr. Pontifex scrutinized the pretty countenance of the Captain's betrothed. It was flushed with excitement, but the red lips were firmly set and the blue eyes steady. His view of her satisfied the solicitor. In the lobby by the servants' hall Mr. Pontifex halted.

"I must leave the rest to you, Miss Boden," he said, "this is your doctored lump of sugar, it will affect the patient almost immediately. Not that it will harm him in the least."

He patted her hand reassuringly as she took the sugar-bowl, registering the position of the important fragment with her small thumb. She moved slowly into the kitchen, placed the bowl on a dresser, and stole to the area door. Mr. Pontifex and the Captain strained their ears, they could catch a glimpse of the coquettish figure through a tiny window in the wall of the passage. The policeman on the pavement turned as the light streamed up through the open door. He was covered with snow from shoes to helmet. The mock kitchen-maid gazed up at him, her woman's wit prompting her.

"I say," she called, with an affectation of innocence, "do tell me what master's done—if it is him you're after, with your searchings and your prowlings."

"It's a case of forgery, my dear," said the constable, patronisingly, peeping through the railings, "and for a thousand or two at that."

"Dear, dear!" was the rejoinder, "how shocking! And isn't this an awful night for you to stand out there all these hours?"

"Duty must be done, my dear," answered the policeman heroically.

"Would you—would you like a drop of something hot?" said the girl, "there's nobody about but me and I could get it for you in a twinkling. I—I have a brother in the force, you know."

The constable wiped his dripping moustache with a big bandanna.

"It—it'd be very welcome," he murmured cautiously, "if you could slip it up to me without anyone seeing."

"Of course I can," said the other, "it's not the sort of evening for people to bother about anyone's business but their own."

"You're right," agreed the constable, "then I will have a nip, my dear, just to drink promotion to your brother, if he's half as good as you he deserves it."

The mock kitchen-maid blushed prettily, and went in to get out the whisky bottle. The policeman observed her appreciatively through the kitchen window as she

"It — it'd be very welcome," he murmured cautiously, "if you could slip it up without anyone seeing."

prepared the steaming mixture, popped in the momentous lump of sugar and skilfully stirred the beverage. She brought the tumbler into the area and passed it up; the constable consumed it in a couple of luxurious gulps.

Caroline Boden received the glass with trembling fingers, she was watching the stout form in the wide oilskin cape. What was to occur next?

The constable leant against the railings, brushing his moustache with his bandanna, his head swayed and his legs bent abruptly. Mr. Pontifex had crept up behind the mock kitchen-maid; he drew her in quickly and shut the area door.

"Captain Appleton," he commanded, "take your hat and hurry out into Berkeley Street. You will find a prostrate constable: he has been overcome, you under-

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stand, with the cold. Send for brandy and attract a crowd, I will deal with Mr. Boden."

The Captain regarded the lawyer in amazement.

"You are a marvel, sir," he said reverently, and roused himself from his stupor to dash off upon the indicated mission.

Mr Pontifex grasped the pink fingers of Captain Appleton's disguised sweetheart.

"My compliments," he told her, "you did that excellently. And now for your father."

He returned to the boudoir, where Mr. Percival Boden, in his shirt sleeves, was superintending the filling of a capacious leather bag.

Mr. Pontifex took it calmly from Lady Frances, shut and hasped it, and tossed it to his client's husband.

"If you wish to escape," he said sternly, "come with me instantly."

"Good gracious!" cried the forger, and flung on the rest of his attire.

Mr. Pontifex caught him by the arm and hastened him downstairs. The old housekeeper let them out.

On the snowy kerb a crowd had collected. Captain Appleton in its midst. The drugged policeman had been propped up by a friendly knee and brandy was being poured into his mouth.

Mr. Pontifex chuckled. "If that constable wakes under two hours," he muttered to himself, "I will never trust morphia again. How he will puzzle the divisional surgeon!"

The lawyer grasped the arm of Mr. Percival Boden and conveyed him into Piccadilly. Mr. Pontifex hailed a cab and drove to St. James', alighting near the block which held his offices.

From an alley in the rear of this building a sombre corridor yielded admission to the solicitor's private room, by means of a second door to that useful apartment.

Mr. Pontifex entered the dim chamber, and drew the heavy double curtains.

This precaution achieved, he switched on a single shaded lamp, opened his safe, took out a slender stone bottle and tilted some fluid into a porcelain dish.

"Rub your face, neck, and arms with that," he desired.

Percival Boden obeyed meekly; when he had finished he looked as if he had been exposed for ten years to the rays of a tropical sun.

"Now," he said, "you will pass for a sailor, but don't use any soap till you are out of Britain. And sell that kit bag for a canvas sack at the earliest opportunity."

He gave the newly-made tar a tiny bag of gold and set him free.

Percival Boden stalked off disconsolately in the driving snow. Mr. Pontifex never saw him again. Neither, for the matter of that, did any member of an English police force.

* * * * *

The morning papers duly recorded, as among the incidents of the night's storm, the fact that a constable, on special duty in Berkeley Street, had been overcome by the cold and carried to the hospital. But, so far as the public were concerned, the nature of the special duty remained a mystery.

Yet Miss Caroline Boden—then, however, Mrs. Leonard Appleton—was audacious enough to write, on the fancy box of wedding cake she forwarded to Mr. Pontifex: "With the kitchen-maid's most grateful remembrances."

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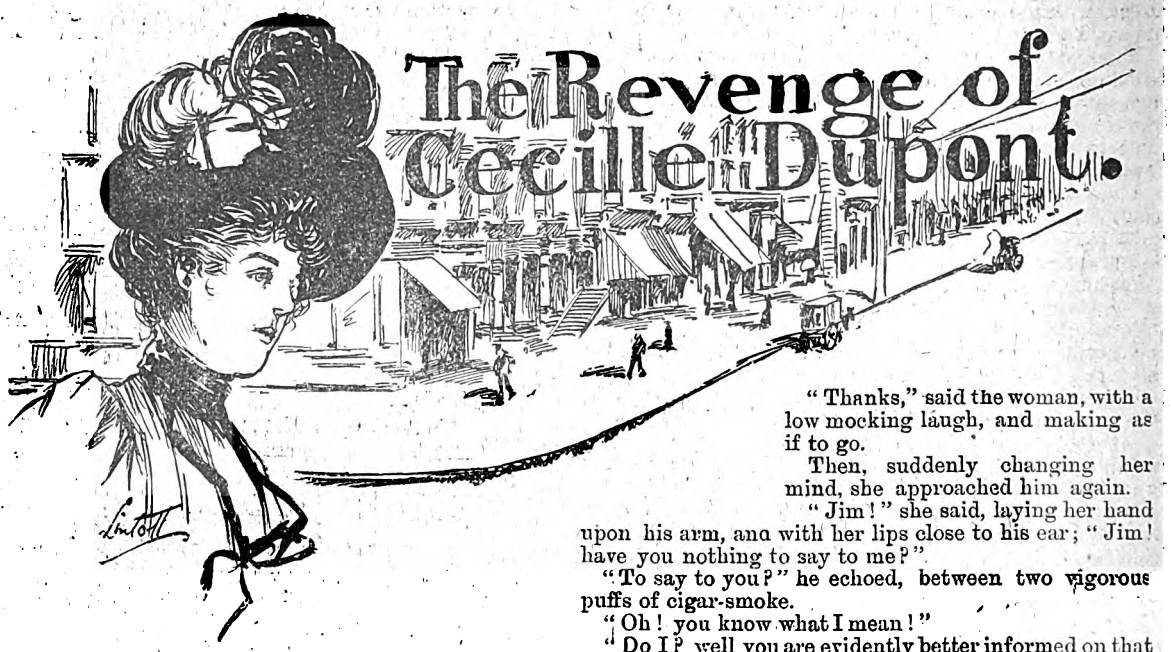
The Revenge of Cecille Dupont.



MARKET STREET, San Francisco, is a wonderful thoroughfare; and, on a certain sunny morning in the month of June last, its thronged sidewalks, crowded stores, and air of general prosperity, testified convincingly to the soundness of its claim to be the busiest street not only in the great Californian city, but in the whole wide world.

Old travellers in these parts will well know the Palace Hotel on this street; stupendous; luxurious; bewildering. They will remember, too, the beautiful vast inner court, with its shimmeringly white colonnades, its palms, and its fountain.

It is here; on this same June morning; that a man and a woman, both fashionably dressed, are in close conversation. The man is a fair specimen of the keen-eyed, sharp featured Northerner, while the woman, in spite of her fine feathers, is evidently of a class knowing far more of "below" Union Square than of Fifth Avenue. New York is as rich in social distinctions as are London and Paris, and the pair in question, arrived overnight from the Empire City by the "Union Pacific" Express, are but a sample of the bulk of the "all sorts and conditions" that go to make up the population of the great cosmopolitan seaport.

"You're sure he's got here?" said the man, meditatively "chawing" his cigar.

"Sh! speak lower; that nigger over there may have sharp ears. Yes, he's here. I saw him leave the steamer, and take a 'hack' for the National Bank."

"Good! now, I'll leave things to you, and get to the Cliff House. You know the idea, persuade him to shift to there, right away if possible, for Pablo's a queer cuss, and I don't think he'll stand much waiting. Crack up the place—but, there, I needn't teach you how to 'blind' him."

"No, leave him to me, and I guess you and Lello will make your 'deal' without much trouble or loss of time."

"Cecille! I always do say that you're a smart girl, and if you only carry this through to the string-end, I'll swear to it."

"Thanks," said the woman, with a low mocking laugh, and making as if to go.

Then, suddenly changing her mind, she approached him again.

"Jim!" she said, laying her hand upon his arm, and with her lips close to his ear; "Jim! have you nothing to say to me?"

"To say to you?" he echoed, between two vigorous puffs of cigar-smoke.

"Oh! you know what I mean!"

"Do I? well you are evidently better informed on that point than I am."

"Why won't you take me more into your confidence. You say to me 'go here'—go 'there!'—but the why and the wherefore you hide from me—you hide from me! It is not fair!"

"That's as you think."

"Heaven knows!" she went on, "you brought me down low enough when you married me! Me! the child of the old 'Knickerbocker' Enslers!—the belle of the 'Four Hundred!'"

"Well," he interrupted her, "what is it that you are aiming at? You were free, I suppose, to marry me or not, as you liked, and as for my confidence—why—I prefer to keep it."

"You are a demon! I will not be a mere slave any longer! It is not you who have made the sacrifice! it is I!—I!—I!— Heaven help me! it is I who have given you all; you have given me—nothing! From the first you deceived me! How was I to know that Orrin Dupont, the suave society man, the apparent millionaire, was really Jim Bloodgood, the arch-swindler and common thief!"

"You jade!" hissed the goaded rascal between his teeth, and wincing in spite of himself. "I'll be even with you—mark me! Get about your work!"

"Will you not at least tell me what you propose doing with this Englishman?"

"No."

"Hard!—hard as stone! You won't tell me?"

"No!" he repeated, savagely, "and no! again."

"You will regret it, then," she said, moving away from his side. "Regret it when it is too late."

"I can look after myself," he sneeringly replied, "and—you—you can go where you like."

Looking him steadily between the eyes for an instant, she turned abruptly and left him.

The man lingered a moment, lounging against a pillar, looked admiringly after her, and then strolled leisurely out through the main entrance into the street.

Straight on up Market, and through, in on oblique

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direction, innumerable cross streets, until he reaches the outskirts of China-town.

Here, at the end of a dark, dirty, narrow street. Orientalised by the many-coloured signs and fluttering rags, and which runs right through the heart of the quarter, the man halts and hesitates a moment, looking intently up at the top-floor windows of the tenth house down.

A scarlet handkerchief waved twice out of the casement, and he moves quickly up to the dwelling, the lower part of which is an evil-odoured, low-class Chinese restaurant.

Passing rapidly through the shop, he is met half-way up the stairs by the owner of the handkerchief.

Pablo, the half-breed, the dusky treader in the dark and devious ways of the Golden City, knows his man, and upon the principle of "rogue mistrusting rogue," expresses neither gratification or the contrary at the other's advent.

The room they reached, and the door of which the Indian carefully fastened by means of a weighty wooden bar, fitting into the socket in the wall, was alike small and squalid. The little dormer window was now shut, rendering the atmosphere of the place unbearable almost to an incomer from the outer air.

"Now, Pablo!" said the man, a trifle irritably, "is everything ready? Quick! and tell me, for very much of this room would about kill me, I think. Is the plant made?"

"Yes, the things are these," replied the other in fairly good English, "but look you, you've made a mistake with Miss Cecille."

"How, a mistake?"

"Why, she knows too much—I don't trust her."

"Shu! Cecille's a true girl. I'd as soon suspect myself or you. Besides, Lello's responsible for her, and he's not likely to nail his faith to a corn-cob."

"Oh! well, all right, she can't hurt me, I'll take care of that, you and Lello must look out for yourselves."

"See here, Pablo, my friend, never fuss over unlikely possibilities. The main thing is your return to Coloma to-night, and that you meet us at Gospel Gulch at sundown, day after to-morrow—savee?"

"Aye, I'll be there. Shall I take Ah-Su with me?"

"Well, I guess so; that wily Chinaman may be useful as a super in our little play. Now, unlock the door. Mind!" turning to leave the room, "Sundown, Friday."

"I've said I'll be there," returned the Indian, impassively, and as the footsteps of his visitor died away down the rickety stairs, he muttered meditatively yet in a half-restrained, angry, impatient way:

"I think you're playing the 'twist' game with me, Mr. James E. Bloodgood; that is, if I may trust my eyes to rightly read yours. Well, you're mighty smart, I know, but if you can 'throw' me," with a grim chuckle, "I give you full leave, my noble New-Yorker."

* * * * *

At the office counter in the great entrance hall of the "Palace," a gentleman, unmistakably English, is making his domiciliary arrangements with the clerk.

"Guess this letter's for you; Henry Babbington Clough Es-quire?"

"Thanks, that's me," said the newly-arrived. "But I don't know anybody here; and it's local," turning the missive, dainty, pink, small, and with just a faint suspicion of scent about it, over and over.

"Best open it," causticly said the clerk shifting his cigar lazily from right to left.

"True!" good humouredly laughed the gentleman, a youngish, fair-haired man of thirty or there abouts.

"Jim!" she said, laying her hand upon his arm, "have you nothing to say to me?"

"The writer wishes for a few moments conversation with Mr. Clough at once."

That was all.

"'Um—no date—no address—no name. Odd!" Then to the clerk, "Lady give you this herself?"

"Guess so."

"What was she like?"

"Elegant!—Paris fashions—New York stamp; but knows cast iron from 'hickory," should say."

"Well, if she asks for me, let me know will you."

"No 'casion, she's right there, over against the elevater door. Waiting you, I guess."

"Good gracious! Excuse me, madan, but are you the writer of this note, and—do you wish to see me?"

"That's so, I am, and do. Come into the court it's quiet there."

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A certain little impervious way she had, very pretty, which puzzled him, even while he almost unconsciously yielded to its influence and followed her.

Close by the marble basin in the centre of the court she stopped, as if by design, for the plash of the descending water would assuredly prevent any inconvenient overhearing by undesirable eavesdroppers.

She was a woman most men of ordinary calibre would have been attracted by. Of medium height; half Spanish in feature and bearing, she had that audaciously piquant way of speech and movement, which to the northern male is so alluringly suggestive of mystery and romance.

But now, somehow, a peculiar change had come over her. She was quiet, sadly so, and appeared to be possessed by an anxious feeling of some sort. This gave to her an added grace and charm, for it indicated, not uncertainly, the real woman.

"Aye, I'll be there. Shall I take Ah-Su with me?"

"You are a rich man?" said Cecille at last, abruptly, reaching over, and laying one hand in the sparkling water.

"Well, yes, I suppose I am," replied her companion, not a little astonished at the strangeness of the query.

No sense of caution or reticence, as to his acknowledgement of the soft impeachment troubled him; he seemed to be under a spell, as it were, of intuitive confidence in his interrogator.

"I asked you the question," she said after a pause, "but I knew all about it," then with a suddenness which almost startled him, "will you do me a kindness?"

He anticipated a request for aid, presumably pecuniary, but her next words, after a courteous "What can I do for you?" from himself, dissipated that idea.

"Simply this," she rejoined. "Change your hotel. For various reasons you are not safe here. The Cliff House on the southernmost headland of Port Lobos would suit you in every way. Will you go?"

"But my dear Mrs,—Miss——"

"Dupont, Mrs. Dupont."

"Thanks! My dear Mrs. Dupont, why should I? I'm very comfortable here."

"Have I not told you, you are not safe here."

"It is very good of you, I am sure, to interest yourself in me in this way; but will you not kindly be more explicit?"

"No! if you disregard my advice, evil will happen."

"Well suppose I agree to follow it, what then? Shall I afterwards have the reading of the riddle?"

"Perhaps," she answered, very sadly. "Perhaps. You will go, and at once?"

"Oh, yes! since I am to do it, I may as well do it without delay."

"You will not regret it, and I am grateful."

"But why should you be grateful for a simple action on my part, that solely concerns myself. Mrs. Dupont, you are an Enigma!"

"By and bye you will see. 'Till then, adieu; and remember, you will hear from and see me again; adieu!"

"Well, that is a consolation, at any rate," said he to himself as he watched her retreating figure. "Yet what an ass I am to be led by the nose by the first pretty woman I meet upon the shores of the Great Republic. However, there's a spice and promise of adventure in it, and—by jove!—I'll see it through!"

A few moments, a passing over of sundry dollars, with extra for breach of contract, and Mr. Henry Babbington Clough is on his way to the Cliff House, at the Golden Gate.

In the guest's parlour at that establishment is our friend James E. Bloodgood, otherwise Colonel Troilus, P. Sajax U. S. A.; otherwise Left Handed Jim, pacing uneasily up and down, and ever and again casting an eager glance out of a window along the sandy road leading up to the hotel. Tired of this exercise, he strolls into the adjoining bar, and orders a "cocktail."

Before, however, he can be served he is accosted by a stranger, who asks him the whereabouts of the "Office," that place in this house off the main hall.

A brief explanation, and the acceptance on the stranger's part of the pilotage to the spot, lead to a general interchange of the usual human gossip and so on,

What followed may shortly be told.

The new guest settled, supper over, and cigars, with their accompaniments, well under way in the verandah, the New York "crook" proceeded to cast his fly. He was in no doubt as to the indentification of the "fish," for the signs to his expert eye, were unmistakable.

"Yes, sir," he said, in his assumed character of a United State Army Officer, "the most extraordinary circumstance you or I ever heard of!"

"Indeed," politely remarked Clough, "and what might this extraordinary circumstance be?"

"Just this, sir. A friend of mine, I may say a par-

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ticular friend, Cyrus Lello of New York, a civil and mining engineer, and well-known in scientific circles, has, he tells me, reliable information from an Indian resident at Colomo, sixty miles east of Sacramento City, of the certain existence of a valuable 'cache,' consisting of an unknown number of 'bricks' of gold, buried there by the latter's grandfather, the then proprietor of the land, more than seventy years ago."

"Well, why doesn't he dig them up?"

"Simply because he's poor, und unable to prospect the plot for the actual hiding-place of the 'find.'"

"I see, he's looking for a capitalist. Well, this Mr. Lello, this friend of yours in New York. Surely he could help him in that way, couldn't he?"

"Lello's only a struggling man. But Lello apart, that's not the whole gist of the matter. This Indian has, it seems, already unearthed two of the bricks, each, (for I've seen them) apparently about 500 ounces, and he's willing to sell these to any one who would be disposed to embark a few thousand dollars in the speculation; he, himself, putting the aforesaid purchase money into the venture."

To say that the Englishman was completely persuaded would be untrue; but he was so far satisfied that he invited his new acquaintance to furnish further details.

Nothing loth, the other forthwith proceeded to enlarge (with sundry highly-coloured embellishments) upon the superlative advantages of the enterprise.

Clough listened, and, in spite of a vague, fought-off feeling of distrust, was impressed.

A distinct and definite offer on the part of the "Colonel," as accredited agent for the "poor Indian," and an acceptance by Harry, conditional upon a satisfactory assay of the precious "bricks," and it was finally agreed that they should leave early the next morning, by the cars, for Sacramento City, the completion of the journey to Coloma, to be made in the six-horse stage of those parts.

Apparently sure now of his quarry, Bloodgood went to his room.

Harry Clough, however, had no inclination to sleepiness, and so lighting a fresh cigar, he strolled out through the entrance way on to the broad plateau facing the glorious seafront of the "Golden Gate."

Directly he had passed the door he fancied he could see a dark form lurking in the shadow of the acanthus bushes.

Who, or what it was, he could not determine.

He had stood, maybe, ten minutes, gazing delightfully upon the moonlit sea, that swept with ceaseless, white-topped playfulness, round and about the famous sea-lions in the bay; when he was startled by a slight tap upon the shoulder.

"Is it not beautiful?" said a now not unfamiliar voice at his elbow.

"Beautiful indeed!" he replied, at a loss to account for this strange re-appearing of the interesting Mrs. Dupont at such a time and place.

"I hope," she said again, "that you are satisfied with the change?"

"Oh! yes, absolutely so, and, strange to say, I have tumbled into a good thing, or, at least, that which promises to be a good thing, through following your advice."

"Yes!"

Then he told her of the "golden-brick" expedition of the morrow. Exactly why he was so communicative he didn't know. Probably, like many another man before and since, he couldn't help the confiding in a pretty woman. Anyway, all that was in his mind on the subject, he told her, save and except with regard to the suspicious shadow. That he instinctively kept back out of sheer self-defence for his own lack of thoroughness and faith.

Leaping into the air, the Chinaman fell dead.

Cecille did not appear (so he thought) to show much interest in the affair, beyond just saying that she trusted it would all result in his expectation being fully realised.

"What time did you say," she asked him, with admirably simulated indifference, "is it that you start for Coloma to-morrow?"

"About six, and that reminds me that I must turn in if I am to have any rest at all."

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"Ah! yes, of course! Pardon me for keeping you here talking when you have so long a journey before you!"

"Not at all! But will you not allow me first to escort you to your home?"

"No thanks! I will go alone. I do not fear molestation." And slightly parting the folds of her "sarepe," she just allowed the glint of a tiny damascened-steel dagger to be momentarily visible.

Harry could only incline his head in courteous acquiescence, then, bidding his companion "Good-night," he turned and strode rapidly away in the direction of the "Cliff House."

Cecille looked after his retreating figure thoughtfully, and silently, for a moment or two.

"Yes," she then muttered to herself, "I, too, must be going—must be about my work! Hard!—hard!—and yet it must be done—it must be done!"

* * * * *

They had left the stage, and were, so the "Colonel" said, within a mile or less of the "half-breed's" ranche.

The Englishman was struck with the appalling desolation of the scene. Despair and ruin marked every step of the way.

In the sides of the banks and mounds of earth, but scantily covered with a sickly vegetation, were scooped hollows, for all the world like to a vast series of deserted rabbit-warrens. Deep ditches, once used as water-channels for gold washing, were now dry, their sides and beds cracked and blistered by the intense heat.

Buildings there were, indeed, but dismantled, squalid, ruinous. Weather-boarded huts, with, here and there, some token which told of a former store, a post-office, or a bank. Habitations certainly, though decayed, but of their tenants, no living sign.

They had now passed into a gorge, the tops of whose sides, well-nigh perpendicularly steep, must have reached upward at least seven hundred feet, when Clough's companion said, pointing towards a miserable-looking low log hut, a hundred yards or so in advance of them:

"Yonder's the place, and that's old Pablo at his door, I take it."

Whether it were that the New-Yorker's thoughts were so set upon his scheme, or whether that he was fearful by any suspicious act of creating a doubt in the mind of his prospective "catch," it is hard to say, but certain it is that neither he nor Clough were in anyway aware of a small party of three (two men and a woman), who had patiently and successfully shadowed them all along the route from Sacrament City.

The well simulated surprise of Pablo at his visitor's advent was only equalled by the pseudo-ingenious introduction of the Englishman by the "Colonel."

Out from the dark recesses of his wretched abode, through the murky atmosphere of which might have been intermittently detected the villainous countenance of the chinaman, Ah-Su, the half breed brought for inspection one of the golden "bricks."

Superficially, it certainly appeared to deserve its character.

There was that curiously "precious" colour-look about it which is associated in men's minds with the outward semblance of the "idol of Ophir." It seemed all right, and the Englishman began to think that the "deal" was genuine.

"Well," said he to the colonel, "I hold to my bargain. Let both 'bricks' be conveyed to Sacramento or to San Francisco, which even our dusky friend prefers, and upon a satisfactory assay I will pay over to him the stipulated amount namely $1.800 for each brick."

A short whispered conversation here took place between Left Handed Jim and Pablo, the latter, by his energetic and vehement gestures and exclamations seeming disinclined to accede to the proposed terms.

"Look here 'Colonel,'" interrupted Clough, "tell him he must decide one way or the other within five minutes, or we shall lose the return stage at Rattlesnake Bar."

"He says he will only hand the 'bricks' over for prompt cash," said the crook, after a whispered word with Pablo, "I should advise an immediate purchase, as the profit is considerable."

"How do you know that?" quickly flashed out Clough. "Well, I've changed my mind, I won't deal. I'm going at once to Rattlesnake Bar; as for you, you can study your own convenience."

While he had been speaking, the Chinaman had crept stealthily out of the hut, (the sun was setting, and gloom was settling down upon everything,) passed round behind the little group in front of the dwelling, and, swinging in his hand a prepared lasso, was soon within "throwing" distance of the Englishman.

As the latter turned to walk away up the "Gulch," the Celestial made his cast, but his victim being on the move, he missed his aim, the rope falling harmlessly to the ground.

Almost at the same moment a report rang out, echoing along the rocky sides of the ravine.

Leaping full three feet into the air, the Chinaman, Ah-Su fell dead in his tracks.

Then a second shot was fired, followed by a woman's shriek.

Clough could just distinguish the form of the "Colonel," standing at bay against the side of the hut, a smoking revolver in his hand.

A few feet from him lay a woman.

Stooping down, Clough recognised her; it was the woman of the letters.

Evidently seriously hurt, she was striving to raise herself on her elbow.

"Jim!—Jim!——" she said, so low that Clough could hardly hear her.

"Who is it you want?" he asked her, putting at the same time his arm under her head.

"Jim!—I'm sorry now I did it, but you forced me to do it. Jim! I can't see—I can't say—any—more—I'm——!"

Her head fell back with a jerk, and Left-Handed Jim's betrayer was gone to her account.

* * * * *

Pablo, the half-breed, had been secured by the detectives, Cecille's companions, before the last act of the tragedy. It was an easy matter afterwards to disarm the "Colonel," the two officers and Clough keeping guard over their two prisoners 'till the morning, when, marching them to Rattlesnake Bar, the stage carried the whole party to Sacramento.

Before leaving they laid poor Cecille in a grave upon the spot where she died.

Her murderer and his accomplice ultimately paid the penalty of their attempted fraud, and actual bloodshedding with twenty years States' Prison apiece.

* * * * *

The "bricks" upon examination were found, as was expected, to be nothing better than base metal, with a veneer, or casing of the genuine article.

Ralph Enderby.

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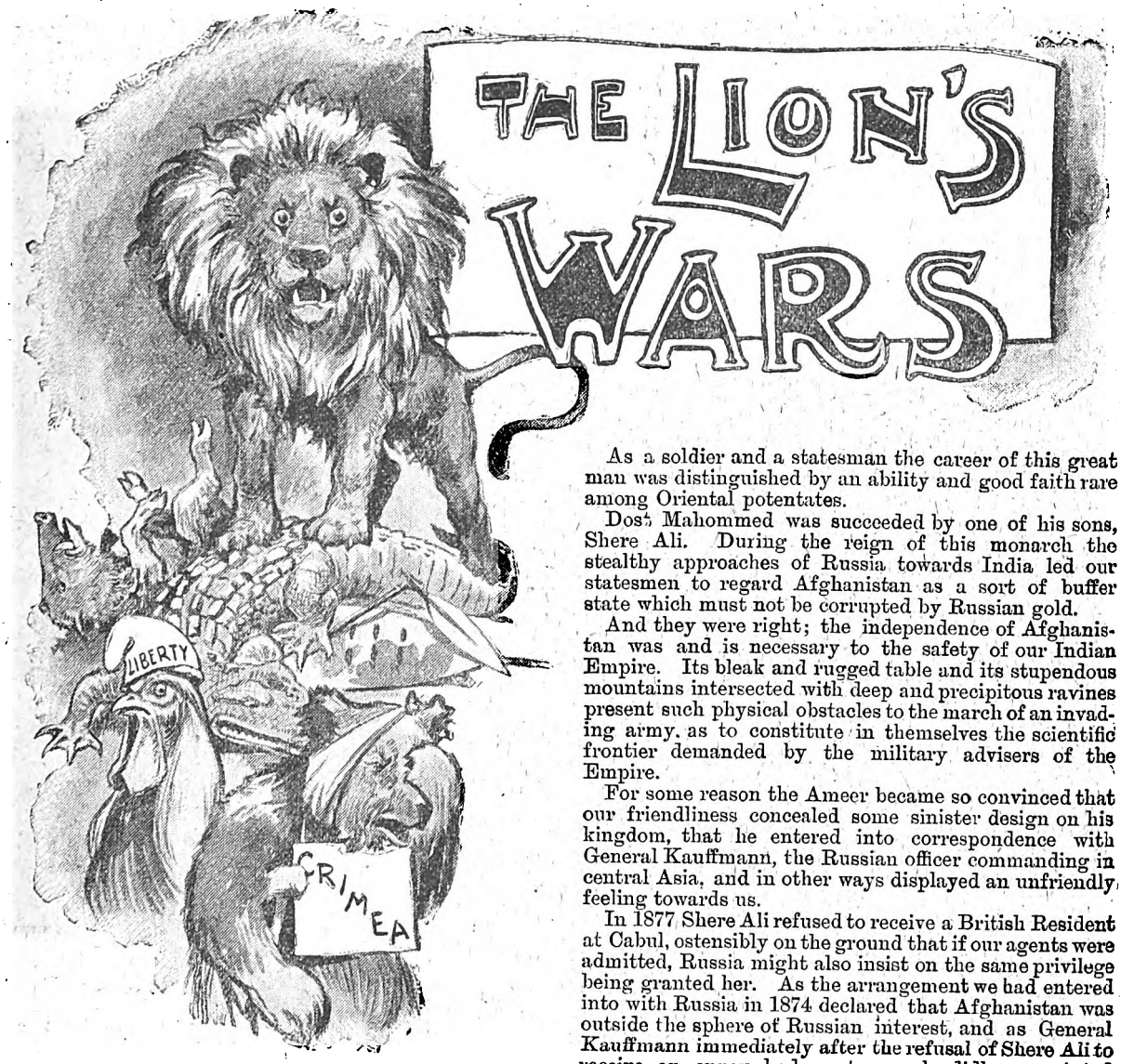

The Second and Third Afghan Wars. 1878-1880.

THE last Afghan War was brought about, it will be remembered, by the British Government espousing the cause of a dynasty so vile that the cruelty and vices of the Princes were too much even for the Afghans themselves.

Although Shah Soojah was one of the cruellest and most dissolute Princes who ever disgraced a throne, we encouraged him to raise an army to recover his lost dominions, and when this enterprise failed gave him a shelter in India and a stiffish pension. Fitness and strength in the East being qualities which ever rank before the nobler virtues, the throne of Afghanistan was taken possession of by Dost Mahommed, of the brave clan of Barukzai.

As a soldier and a statesman the career of this great man was distinguished by an ability and good faith rare among Oriental potentates.

Dost Mahommed was succeeded by one of his sons, Shere Ali. During the reign of this monarch the stealthy approaches of Russia towards India led our statesmen to regard Afghanistan as a sort of buffer state which must not be corrupted by Russian gold.

And they were right; the independence of Afghanistan was and is necessary to the safety of our Indian Empire. Its bleak and rugged table and its stupendous mountains intersected with deep and precipitous ravines present such physical obstacles to the march of an invading army, as to constitute in themselves the scientific frontier demanded by the military advisers of the Empire.

For some reason the Ameer became so convinced that our friendliness concealed some sinister design on his kingdom, that he entered into correspondence with General Kauffmann, the Russian officer commanding in central Asia, and in other ways displayed an unfriendly feeling towards us.

In 1877 Shere Ali refused to receive a British Resident at Cabul, ostensibly on the ground that if our agents were admitted, Russia might also insist on the same privilege being granted her. As the arrangement we had entered into with Russia in 1874 declared that Afghanistan was outside the sphere of Russian interest, and as General Kauffmann immediately after the refusal of Shere Ali to receive an envoy had sent a splendidly appointed embassy into the country, it will be seen that the time had arrived for Calcutta to act with decision. Lord Lytton, the Viceroy, at once informed the Ameer that he also intended sending an embassy to Cabul, of which Sir Neville B. Chamberlain would be the head.

On September 21st, 1878, the mission—or, as the enemies of this country called it, the army—for it numbered 1,000 persons including 234 soldiers and twelve officers—left Peshawur, and, escorted by the Afridis, a freebooting clan, were conducted to the Afghan outposts. Here they stayed, sending on Major Lewis Cavagnari to Ali Musjid to arrange with the Ameer for the safe conduct of the embassy.

At that fort, which lies close to the dreaded Khyber Pass just within the Afghan frontier, Major Cavagnari and his embassy were confronted by an Afghan officer who threatened to attack the embassy if they did not at once retire.

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Not being strong enough to resent this insult, Sir Neville Chamberlain had no alternative but to return.

An apology was at once demanded of the Ameer for this outrage, with an intimation that it must be accompanied by a written undertaking to receive a British Resident at Cabul.

As no answer was received to what was really an ultimatum, war was declared.

Preparations for attacking the country at two points were instantly commenced, the destination of the one army being Candahar, the other Cabul. The hill-men having been prevailed on by lavish gifts of money to allow our troops to cross their country, Sir Samuel Browne, on November 21st, marched to Ali Musjid. Great confidence was reposed in the little army, perhaps because the soldiers were clothed in khaki, a colour which was then supposed to be invisible at 400 yards.

The Afghans fully believed their fort, although the materials were nothing but hardened mud faced with stone, to be impregnable, but the mountain guns and an elephant battery played sad havoc with the fortifications. The fort artillery silenced, and some yawning breaches made, the attack was delivered.

After rushing a couple of villages and bayoneting scores of Afghans found lurking in the scrub, the first line of defence was reached. The breastworks and intrenchments formed of rough boulders presented a most formidable appearance. The day was waning fast and the British general was debating the advisability of postponing the assault when the 27th Punjaubis, carried away by excitement, made a mad rush for the intrenchments. Had the light been good they might have succeeded, but in the gloom the brave Punjaubis could not see their way and were shot down like sheep by the well-posted foe.

Then the Fates conspired against them. General Browne before starting had sent a brigade under General Tytler to cut off the retreat of the garrison by way of Kala Kushta. The proximity of this column was conveyed to them at the very moment they were gloating over their slaughter of the Punjaubis. The dismay it created was so great that they at once bolted, greatly to the disgust of our men, who had looked forward to a busy day in the fortifications.

But the Afghans did not escape. The darkness which had helped them to repulse the Punjaubis played them a trick an hour or so later.

Accustomed as they were to the country, the darkness was so great that they entered the wrong pass, never discovering the mistake till they came face to face with Tytler's men. A desperate fight ensued, the Afghans offering a most stubborn resistance, but we worked our men round the fugitives and attacked them in the rear.

Thoroughly beaten, the garrison surrendered the prisoners, including General Cholam Hyder Khan, the Mir Akbur or Ameer's Master of the Horse, a bitter opponent of Britain and strongly suspected of being a paid emissary of Russia.

This victory greatly dismayed the Khyberese tribes, especially as our success prompted the Afridis to intercept the retreat of another band of Afghans, 500 strong. As their predatory instincts were even greater than their love of fighting, they gave them their liberty after stripping them of their arms, clothing, and camp equipage. But Shere Ali had even greater cause for uneasiness than the capture of Choder Hyder Khan.

The larger of the columns, known as the celebrated Kurram column, under the command of General Roberts, who since the days of the Mutiny had taken an active part in Indian warfare, had entered his dominions.

"Bobs is coming," ran like wildfire through the hills, and the bronzed cheeks of the Afghan soldiers paled. The Viceroy had proposed Moultan as a rendezvous for all troops attached to this column, but such dilatory tactics were so little to the taste of the fiery little general that he pushed forward regiment after regiment as it arrived.

Roberts being a name which inspired as much respect as fear, the native princes and chieftains were lavish in their offers of assistance. Transport cattle, elephants, stores, poured in, the Khan Khelet supplying 20,000 quarters of wheat at market price. Thoroughly alarmed, and acting on the advice of his Russian advisers, the Ameer issued 3,000 rifles to the Ghilzie and Kanaris tribes, besides offering them a large sum to oppose our advance.

As the Ghilzies alone numbered 20,000 hardy mountaineers their support was worth securing. Not that they could have stemmed General Roberts' advance, for the Kurran column consisted of 14,000 seasoned soldiers, exclusive of the contingent furnished by the native Princes.

Ali Musjid taken, and the Khyber opened up the frontier was crossed. On approaching Kapping fort the enemy fled. The country then became rugged and mountainous in the extreme.

It required a general of great capacity to steer his way through the gloomy gorges and passes of Afghanistan without loss, and Roberts succeeded because he was a great general. Afghans, hawk-eyed and grim, sat on the craggy peaks over-hanging some pass, prepared to rain a storm of lead on the advancing troops, and after waiting some hours would learn that the little man had gone a different route.

The hostility of the inhabitants greatly diminished as he advanced. The Asiatic cringe was noticeable five miles from Ali Musjid. At Lundi Khani the demeanour of the village head men partook of fawning. Encouraged by the signs of submission Major Cavagnari rode forward to Loi Dakka, where he was met by Mohammed Shah Khan of Lapura, and hitherto the Ameer's trusted ally. Cavagnari gave His Highness such a freezing reception that to escape the punishment he saw was coming he at once humbly submitted.

Still Cabul was not to be reached without fighting. On November 20th, Roberts' force entered a region of dwarf palm, scrub, and dry grass. That night the district was fired simultaneously in twenty places, our tents having a narrow escape.

Roberts was always good at forced marches. He made one that night, the men never halting till an open plain was reached.

After this, orders were given to reduce the camp following, and this was done so ruthlessly that one bell tent only was allowed for fifteen soldiers.

Kurram fort was then seized to safeguard our communication, and although the cold was intense and snow was falling fast, the Army, destitute as it was of baggage, was pushed forward to engage the enemy who could now be seen a few miles ahead. We overtook them at Peiwar village, but as the men were exhausted Roberts decided to attack the following day.

The Ameer's troops were found to occupy some upper hills for a distance of four miles, with guns at each end to resist Roberts' dreaded flanking attacks. The position was so strong that Roberts determined to give his men

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Drawn by] The Highlanders dashed for the second stockade. [C. Lawson Wood.

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another rest and carry it by a night attack. On the night of December 1st the troops marched out, and, crossing the deep ravine, began silently climbing the hills.

Although the native troops had been selected with the greatest care there were traitors in the camp. As we neared the enemy a couple of rifles were fired. Fortunately, the reports attracted no attention.

About 6 a.m. the weary soldiers reached the crest of the hill. Here all further passage was barred by ramparts of fallen trees 8ft. high. Then came a dozen shots. The Afghan pickets had spied our presence. Although taken by surprise they clung desperately to their position, till we got in amongst them. Then the clubbed rifles and bayonets of the British, and the long knives of the ferocious little Ghurkas, proved more than a match for the muskets and daggers of the tribesmen.

The first position carried, the Highlanders, between whom and the Ghurkas a friendly but strong rivalry existed, dashed for the second stockade.

After an obstinate resistance the foe were also driven from this stronghold. The first streaks of dawn were creeping into the newly-born day when the Afghans made their last effort, a charge down hill right into our ranks.

This was repelled with such force that the mountaineers retreated disheartened, fleeing across the plateau of the Spin Guard.

After having reached the summit of the Shutargardan, 1,150ft., and thoroughly explored the surrounding country, which was one of the objects of the expedition, General Roberts retraced his steps. Then both columns, by dint of hard fighting, in all of which the Afghans displayed the greatest courage, at last neared their respective destinations.

Shere Ali, now seeing that resistance was hopeless, took to flight. He was succeeded by his son, Yakoub Khan. Our prestige vindicated, peace was concluded at Gandamak, May 4th, 1879.

By this treaty we undertook to allow the new Ameer £60,000 a year, on condition that a British Resident was received at Cabul and certain cessions of territory granted to secure us a desirable frontier. Sir Louis Cavagnari, our representative, was well received by the Ameer, but it was not long before the populace of Cabul began to exhibit signs of unrest.

A couple of months later disputes became frequent between the native soldiery and the British escort. The authority of Yakoub, too, never very strong, now began to weaken and presently the roads about the Residency became infested with roving bands of disaffected ruffians, who made no secret of their intention to rid their country of the stranger. During July and August there was no actual outbreak, but the signs were ominous.

On September 3rd the Residency was attacked by a crowd of soldiers. During the whole of that day and through the night the tumult raged.

Failing after the most desperate fighting to force an entrance, lighted brands were hurled on the roof of the building, and soon the Residency was in flames.

Messengers were dispatched to the Ameer for assistance but none came.

When all hopes had vanished Sir Louis Cavagnari placed himself at the head of the survivors and made a desperate effort to break through the ranks of the mutineers. But the garrison had dwindled to a handful and were driven back.

The Resident fought with all the coolness of a trained soldier and slew half-a-dozen of the enemy with his own hand, but the odds were too great.

It was in the garden that he received the wound which cost him his life.

"Take me indoors," he whispered to the orderly; "don't let them touch my body."

The fire was raging overhead when the servant laid his master's body on the floor. For once the devouring element was merciful.

The roof crashed in, preserving the envoy's body from the last insult of a savage foe. On September 4th, all was quiet again in Cabul. The Residency was in ashes and all the embassy murdered. But they succeeded in killing 410 of the wretches and wounding over 1,500 before they succumbed.

When the news of what had happened reached India a cry for vengeance rang trumpet-like through the land.

How history repeats itself! In 1841 the Afghans murdered the stranger within their gates and an army of retribution was dispatched to avenge their death, and now a similar crime had to be avenged.

That grand soldier, Sir Donald Stewart, was placed in command of the army, which started for Afghanistan without a moment's delay. Deeply incensed, our men beat down all opposition with such stern ferocity that on December 24th, 1879, Sir Donald entered Cabul, another force capturing Kandahar. Whether Yakoub Khan was privy to the murder of the Resident was not and probably never will be known. The circumstances were suspicious and that was enough. He was dethroned and sent a prisoner to India.

But though British troops held Cabul and Kandahar, we were not masters of the country. Mohammed Khan, one of Yakoub's generals, collected a large number of fanatical warriors, and demanded the release of his sovereign. Receiving no reply he proclaimed Musa Khan, the young son of ex-Ameer Yakoub, and then sought out the British general and demanded that two British officers should be surrendered as hostages till Calcutta had either released Yakoub or recognised his son.

Sir Donald Stewart, not being a soldier of the Elphinstone class, sallied out of the city and, falling on Mohammed Khan's army, utterly defeated it.

Needless to say Russia was not idle in these troublous times. Seeing the throne vacant, she pushed forward a new claimant, Abdurrahman Khan, a grandson of Dost Mohammed and a man, for all his youth, of great ability and force of character.

To still further complicate matters, Ayoub Khan, a son of Shere Ali, who had long been the guest of the Shah of Persia, raised an army of Heratees and advanced against Kandahar, where we had established a certain Shere Ali Khan as an independent Wali. Three claimants to the throne, all hating each other but all united in their hostility of Britain.

The question presented no difficulties to us. It was simply which of the three claimants it was to our interest to support.

After much deliberation we selected Abdurrahman Khan for the simple reason that his chances of success seemed greatest.

It was true he had dealings with Russia, but Sir Lepel Griffin, the new representative at Cabul, was an able man, and would give the new Ameer to understand that our support was necessary to the retention of the throne.

At this juncture another terrible disaster befel our arms.

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General Burrows, an officer of no great experience, was sent by General Primrose, who commanded at Kandahar, with a force of 2,500 men, of whom only 500 were British, to oppose the advance of Ayoub Khan. The Afghan pretender was at the head of a force of 12,000 men with thirty-six guns.

The two armies met at Maiwand on July 27th and for a time the chances of success, owing to the steady courage of the British, seemed to be with us.

Suddenly some Bombay Sepoys who had never before been in action, were seized with a panic, and threw the whole army into a state of disorganization.

Burrows at once saw that the only way of escaping annihilation was a retreat on Kandahar.

Repeated charges soon transformed our little army into a rabble, and when the ammunition was gone, to a flying mob.

Then a fresh disaster occurred. The retreating army took the wrong road.

Fighting every inch of the way, the little force, famished with thirst, for they had been days without water, at last to their joy reached Ayandeh river.

From here Burrows pushed on to Kandahar, leaving the undaunted British to keep the enemy at bay till relief came. When General Brooke arrived to bring the survivors back, he found our fellows in the act of charging their foes with all the confidence of victorious troops. The battle of Maiwand counts, of course, as one of our Indian defeats; but it was not the fault of our men, they fought like lions.

Ayoub Khan, flushed with success, then laid siege to Kandahar, the fortifications of which had all fallen into ruin.

Sir Donald Stewart and his advisers were terribly perplexed when the news reached them. Were Kandahar to fall a blow would be struck at our prestige that would shake the Empire to its foundations. The calamity would be even greater were Ayoub Khan to beat off any force sent to relieve the besieged. The distance to be covered was over 318 miles, and so little was known of the country that the advance would have to be made with great caution.

Under any circumstances, the progress of the relieving force must be slow, for the transport necessary for an army of 10,000 men rendered speed impossible unless, of course, it were reduced to a minimum.

All eyes turned towards Roberts when this only possible way of saving Kandahar dawned on the Council of War. The lion-hearted little soldier's reply was simple but to the point. "Give me a few days to make ready and I will go."

On August 9th the dauntless general and his faithful followers left Cabul on a march of 318 miles through a mountainous country peopled by turbulent and warlike tribes. Sir Frederick Roberts had a sharp attack of fever but his iron will enabled him to keep it in subjection. Relentless as Fate the troops marched.

On, on, on, the journey seemed endless. "Would relief never come?" cried their beleaguered countrymen. Yes, it was close at hand.

Three weeks, only three weeks, and Roberts had reached Kandahar. It was evening when he arrived. Too late to fight, he gave his men a good night's rest and next morning fell like a thunderbolt on Ayoub Khan and crushed him. A grand achievement. The story of the march to Kandahar filled Europe with wonder and admiration. It stamped Lord Roberts as a great general, one of the greatest the world has ever known.

End of First Series.

Short Stories That . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "Guilty Gold," by Headon Hill, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, April 22nd. Post-cards only, please. The prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. John Stokoe, of 9 Suffolk Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus *.

An eminent judge, who was said to be one of the most compassionate of men, once presided over a criminal court. His softness of heart, however, did not prevent him from doing his duty as a judge.

A man who had been convicted of stealing a small amount was brought into court for sentence. He looked very sad and hopeless, and the court was much moved by his contrite appearance.

"Have you ever been sentenced to imprisonment?" the judge asked.

"Never, never!" exclaimed the prisoner, bursting into tears.

"Don't cry, don't cry," said the judge, consolingly, "you're going to be now!"

---

* Jipkins had read a paragraph in which it said that if a man looked at his watch in the presence of others, some of the company were bound to do the same. He got into a tramcar one day in which there were only two men seated opposite to each other, and he thought he saw his way clear to win five shillings. He sat down by the side of one man, whose opposite neighbour wore a beautiful chain, which he fingered nervously at intervals.

"You see the gentleman sitting opposite?" whispered Jipkins to his neighbour.

"Yes."

"I can make him pull his watch out of his pocket and consult the time without saying a word to him."

"I don't think you can," said the other, smilingly.

"I'll bet you five shillings I do," said Jipkins.

"Done."

With much ostentation Jipkins pulled his watch from his pocket, and while he pretended to consult it, he kept his eyes fixed on his opposite neighbour; but that individual only twirled his chain and rubbed his nose, and then began to whistle softly.

"I think you have lost," whispered Jipkins' neighbour.

"Wait a minute," said Jipkins, "I'll try him again."

Again he tried him without the desired effect, when his neighbour said:

"You may as well pay. That man has just pawned his watch in order to pay me a bill he has owed me for six months."

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A chemist can never claim to be a great artist in his profession, for the majority of his works are of very bad taste.

"So you're going to be married at last?"
"Yes."
"And who is to be the best man at the wedding?"
"I am."

An old man would not believe that he could hear his wife talk a distance of five miles by telephone. His better half was in a shop several miles away, where there was a telephone, and the sceptic was also in a place where there was a similar instrument. On being told how to operate it he walked boldly up and shouted:
"Hello, Betty."
At that instant lightning struck the telephone wire, and knocked the man down, and as he scrambled to his feet, he excitedly cried:
"That's ar Betty, by gum, every inch."

Little Tommy had just left the house for school when he met the clergyman on his usual visit.
"Well, Tom, off to school? How are you getting on?"
"Fine, sir!"
"Do you know the seasons yet, Tom?"
"I think so. There are—are—are——"
"Tom, Tom! There's spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Didn't you know that? Now, what season is this?"
Tommy's face immediately cleared as he quickly replied:
"The football season, sir!"

Angelina had invited her young man to tea. Everything had passed off harmoniously until Angelina's seven-year-old brother broke the blissful silence by exclaiming:
"Oh, ma, you oughter seen Mr. Light the other night when he called to take Angie to the fancy dress ball; he looked so nice sittin' 'longside of her, with his arm——"
"Fred," screamed the maiden—whose face began to assume the colour of a well-done boiled lobster—quickly placing her hand over the boy's mouth.
"You oughter seen him," continued the persistent informant after gaining his breath, and the embarrassed girl's hand was removed, "he had his arm——"
"Freddie!" shouted the mother, as, in her frantic attempt to reach the boy's left ear, she upset the contents of the teapot in Mr. Light's lap, making numerous war maps over his new grey trousers, and causing him to emit a yell of agony as the boiling fluid coursed over his legs.
"I was just goin' to say," the frightened boy pleaded between a cry and an injured whine, "he had his arm——"
"You, James!" thundered the father, "get out of the room!"
And the boy made for the door, exclaiming, as he waltzed away:
"I was only goin' to say Mr. Light had his Army clothes on, and I'll leave it to him if he hadn't."
And the boy was permitted to return, and the remainder of the meal was spent in explanations from the family in regard to the number of times Freddie had to be "talked to" for using his finger as a spoon.

Count Jonah: "I was terribly put out at my hotel this morning."
Smart: "That so? They retained your luggage, I suppose?"

"No," sadly said the stranger at the restaurant, as he looked at the cup of coffee handed out to him, "you can take it back. I haven't the heart to attack anything so weak as that. It's against my principles."

Freddie: "I say, Charlie, there must be company in the parlour."
Charlie: "What makes you think so?"
Freddie: "Mamma just called papa 'my dear'!"

"Your husband has started a great many enterprises, I believe?"
"He has."
"How has he succeeded?"
"Failed in everything. But he has got hold of something now that will hold water, I think."
"Ah, indeed?"
"Yes; he has gone into the milk business."

"It's a very sad case about that big burglary at Simpson's house last night, isn't it?"
"Burglary at Simpson's? I hadn't heard of it? What did the burglars get?"
"A big haul of money. All the savings of the poor fellow for the past four years."
"You don't say so? Why did he have such a sum in the house?"
"He had given it to his wife to pay a dressmaking bill."

First Guest: "Hi! waiter, open that window, please. The room is suffocating."
Waiter: "Yessir." (Opens the window).
Second Guest: "Waiter, there's draught enough to kill one. Shut the window!"
Waiter: "Yessir." (Shuts the window).
First Guest: "Waiter, open that window again this minute!"
Waiter: "Very good, sir!" (Goes to the landlord). "One of the gentlemen wants the window open and the other wants it shut. What am I to do?"
Landlord: "Obey the gentleman who hasn't had dinner yet."

At a Sunday-school service a clergyman was explaining to a number of smart little urchins the necessity of Christian profession in order properly to enjoy the blessings of Providence in this world, and to make it apparent to the youthful mind, he said:
"For instance, I want to introduce water into my house. I turn it on. The pipes and faucets and every convenience are in good order, but I get no water. Can any of you tell me why I don't get any water?"
He expected the children to see that it was because he had not made connection with the main in the street. The boys looked perplexed. They could not see why the water should refuse to run into his premises after such faultless plumbing.
"Can no one tell me what I have neglected?" reiterated the good man, looking at the many wondering faces bowed down by the weight of the problem.
"I know," squeaked a little five-year-old. "You don't pay up!"

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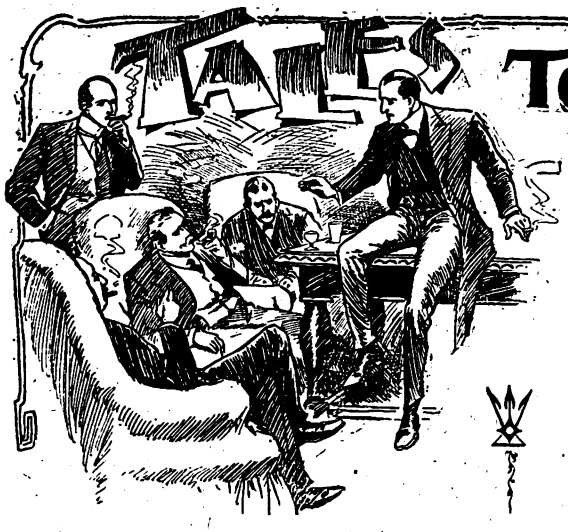

Tales Told off Duty.

[You probably don't know the "Stand-Easy" Club. It isn't in the directory, and you might live next door to the place for years without knowing of its existence by that name. It isn't a conventional club; there is no subscription, and there is no register of members. It is merely a room in a quiet, orderly, and select hostelry in Westminster, where, by common consent, a number of officials of all kinds meet when "off duty." There you may find detectives from Scotland Yard, near by; firemen, commissionaires, a soldier or two, and maybe a doctor from St. Thomas' Hospital or elsewhere. A motley crowd they would be if they wore their uniforms, but at the "Stand-Easy" uniforms are a rarity, "mufti" being the unwritten rule. The result is a gathering of quiet, well-behaved, and well-dressed men. Saturday night is the time when one sees the biggest muster, for then it is the custom for one member to regale the company with a story, the story being, as a rule, an account of some incident in the teller's own career.]

Morse's Exclusive.

Told by the REPORTER.

YOUNG Devine, the alert reporter on the DAILY DAWN, seldom entered the club till quite late in the evening, and when he appeared some weeks ago there was a general call for a story. Here follows Devine's contribution.

It was never any affair of mine (he said) why the Hon. John Morse, third son of the Earl of Wyncott, became a junior reporter on the DAWN, but so it was; and the little envelope which the cashier handed him every Friday morning was apparently of much more importance to him than his prefix, as he promptly dropped the latter on becoming a newspaper man. We soon saw that the young aristocrat was not built for this kind of work. He was painstaking and reliable, but of journalistic "flair," or "nose for news," he had not a particle. He was generally popular among his colleagues, for the rest, though he never talked much, and was of a melancholy and sardonic cast of countenance.

Things were very quiet when he joined us. Every foreign potentate was in an aggravatingly robust state of health. Parliament was not sitting, the cables from South Africa were silent, so orders went forth that the event to be head-lined was the coming Dudingstone-Carr wedding, the Society sensation of the time.

The interesting feature of the affair consisted in the youth, beauty, and utter poverty of the bride. She was believed to be an orphan, though nobody knew definitely on that point, and it was generally recognised that her only fortune lay in her violet eyes, and spun-gold hair. She was very young, very vivacious, very charming. On the other hand Lord Dudingstone had been looked upon any time these twenty years as a confirmed bachelor, and the news that he was about to bestow his ancient title and enormous rent-roll

"Take particular notice of the big ruby. They say it's the biggest in the world."

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on the pretty, penniless unknown, was a trumpet-call to the gossips of Mayfair.

"Look here," said Lomax, the news editor of the Dawn, to Morse one fine morning. "I want you to do a nice third of a column on the Dudingstone-Carr wedding presents. They are on view now at this number in Brook Street, and I'm told that a more magnificent show has never been seen. Take particular notice of the big ruby from the Maharajah of Chillapore—they say it's the biggest in the world, and the native name means 'The Sea of Fire.' Why, what's the matter with you?"

We all noticed that Morse had turned deadly pale, but he muttered confusedly that it was "nothing," and we soon heard the rattle of his cab as he sped away to Brook Street.

"I have heard," remarked a man, "that Morse used to be engaged to the little Carr girl."

"Get out!" we shouted, all except Lomax.

"I've heard that, too," growled he, lighting a fresh cigar, "and I should like to get at the parts of the Morse-Carr mystery. Nobody knows who she is, while it's common knowledge that Morse is the son of the old Earl of Wyncott, broke to the world, and obliged to go into the newspaper business to get a living. Well, well, it's a rum show, this wicked old world of ours."

Just at that moment a startling thing happened. One of the subs burst into the room with a face of amazement.

"Heard the latest?" he shouted, "seen the casualties? Both Morse's elder brothers are dead of enteric at Pretoria, and he's heir to everything."

We stared at each other. This aristocratic recruit was certainly provocative of some amount of excitement among his colleagues.

"The old man can't last long, either," added Lomax, so interested that he had to take his cigar out of his mouth to say it.

"Dying by inches, they tell me," struck in somebody else. "Morse will be a belted earl before we know where we are! The income attached to the title is something like £150,000 a year."

Meanwhile, Morse was being rattled in a cab towards Brook Street, and we found out afterwards what happened there.

It was a fact that our new reporter and Phyllis Carr had loved, and parted. Both were penniless, and after a year of waiting there came one morning a wild, piteous letter to John Morse, inclosing a shabby little turquoise ring. It was the old story of "ma mither pressed me sair"—only in this case the mother was represented by an aunt with a large family of her own, who had sheltered the friendless orphan-girl since her parents' death. Morse suffered, but did not attempt to induce reconsideration of Phyllis' decision, and the light-hearted boy, known to his intimates as "Happy Jack," became the weary-eyed, grave man, whose gloomy face gave the young lions of the Dawn so many opportunities for ribald wit.

In Brook Street the costly gifts, whose number and value had induced a morning paper to devote a special article to them, lay displayed on various tables, the Maharajah's ruby blazing in the place of honour. One or two friends of the bridegroom were moving about the tables as Morse entered the room, and a tall, acidulated dowager had just exclaimed in an irritated tone: "Where's ours?" as her eye wandered over the glittering array. In the background a man dressed as a footman, most absurdly unlike a servant and most absurdly like nothing else but a detective, hovered unobtrusively.

A tall, bent man bowed to him from the doorway.

The reporter was making some notes when a slim figure in black, with a sweet, pale face, and a most woe-begone expression for a prospective bride, came in. Phyllis Carr's voice trembled ever so slightly as she spoke to him.

"If you will come into the drawing-room I will give you some tea, Jack," she remarked.

"Thank you," was Morse's equally brilliant reply. To the eyes of the acidulated dowager and her companions, the most commonplace incident in the world. Morse's hand shook as he took the cup from Phyllis. Idly they talked on indifferent subjects; Phyllis displayed a polite interest in newspaper work, and Jack was charmed to hear of various festivities in which the girl had been taking part. All the while the man's burning eyes

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devoured every detail of the future Lady Dudingstone's face. They were both playing with fire, and they knew it, and gradually there came little silences—glances and sighs took the place of words. Suddenly Jack sprang up.

"I mustn't stay, Phyl," he said, with a bitter smile. "Let's see, I haven't wished you happiness yet, have I?"

The girl flinched as if he had struck her.

"Don't be so cruel, Jack," she murmured, "if you only knew—"

"Stop! don't tell me," cried Morse, almost violently. "Don't you think I have enough to suffer already?"

"Am I not suffering, too?" burst out the girl, with a passionate gesture. "Oh, Jack, I am so unhappy. I can't marry him feeling as I do."

"In mercy—no more!" groaned poor Morse, putting out his hands. "I am only flesh and blood, and Heaven only knows what I shall say if I stop here!"

Blindly, with quivering lips and distorted face, he turned to go, but started back with an exclamation. A tall, bent man with iron-grey hair bowed to him from the doorway.

"Lord Dudingstone!"

The tall man turned to his *fiancée*, who had covered her face with her hands.

"Forgive me," he said, with a certain sad tenderness, "for any presumption in supposing that so much youth and loveliness would bestow itself on one so battered and world-weary as myself. I have never felt worthy, Miss Carr, of the honour which you once consented to do me, and after what I have heard and seen I feel that I can claim it no longer."

His voice broke a little here, but, quickly recovering himself, he went on:

"And I hope you will let a very sincere friend wish you long life and every happiness. Sir," he turned to Jack, "you have won and I have lost. I can only say that I am glad Miss Carr has chosen your father's son."

And hiding behind a mask of grave politeness his own broken grief and disappointment, the peer bowed and left them.

* * * * *

"Got anything?" said Lomax gruffly, as Morse entered the Dawn office, "about the robbery I mean?"

"What robbery?" asked Morse blankly.

"He says 'what robbery?'" groaned the news-editor, madly clutching his curly hair with both hands. "Great Scott, man, you have been to Broad Street this afternoon, I suppose? Well, you heard, of course, that an attempt was made to steal the 'Sea of Fire,' and the thieves caught red-handed. What have you got about it?"

"Nothing," said the reporter, boldly.

"Nothing!" shouted a voice in his ear. It was Carnegan, the editor-in-chief, a big, bull-necked man with an evil, small, grey eye. He was very flushed, and apparently very angry. "Nothing!" he repeated, in a sort of wail. "And you were there—there, on the spot! You ought to be sjamboked! Oh, you—you——"

Words failed him and he dashed to the door.

"Look here," he said, savagely, turning round, "we've had about enough of you on this paper. Why on earth did you take to the newspaper business while there were crossings to be swept? I wonder you aren't ashamed to draw your salary. You are no more a journalist than our cat. You needn't stop after to-day—see? Go and ask the cashier for a month's money. Bah!"

He ended with a snarl of contempt, and banged the door behind him.

"Well," said Morse, cheerfully, "that anticipates me by about five minutes. By-the-bye," turning to Lomax, "I've got an 'exclusive,' which might be useful."

The news-editor looked up in astonishment.

"Let's have it," he commanded.

"The Dudingstone-Carr wedding is off," replied the ex-reporter.

"Great Scott!" The news editor bounded in his chair. "Why, man, the frocks are made, date fixed, presents sent in—where did you get it?"

"From Lord Dudingstone himself."

"What, has he jilted her?"

"Not exactly," said Morse. "She's going to marry somebody else, as a matter of fact."

"Gee whizz! and who may that be?" asked Lomax, aflame with curiosity.

"Me," said the ex-reporter, blandly.

£100 REWARD!

The sum of One Hundred Pounds will be given by the Proprietors of Pearson's Weekly *to that person who, on or before Tuesday, April 23rd, first acquaints them with the name of the individual or individuals who killed James Trent and the manner in which he was killed.*

All attempts must be written on the form below, and in the fullest possible manner.

Envelopes should be marked "Trent" in the top left-hand corner, and should be addressed to the Editor, Pearson's Weekly, *Henrietta Street, London, W.C. The Editor's decision is final.*

I think .....

killed James Trent in the following manner .....

.....

.....

Name .....

Address .....

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The actual way in which James Trent was killed is known only to the author of the story and to the Editor of *P. W.* The manuscript containing the description of the murder is locked up in the Editor's safe, and will not be sent to the printer's until after the Competition is closed.

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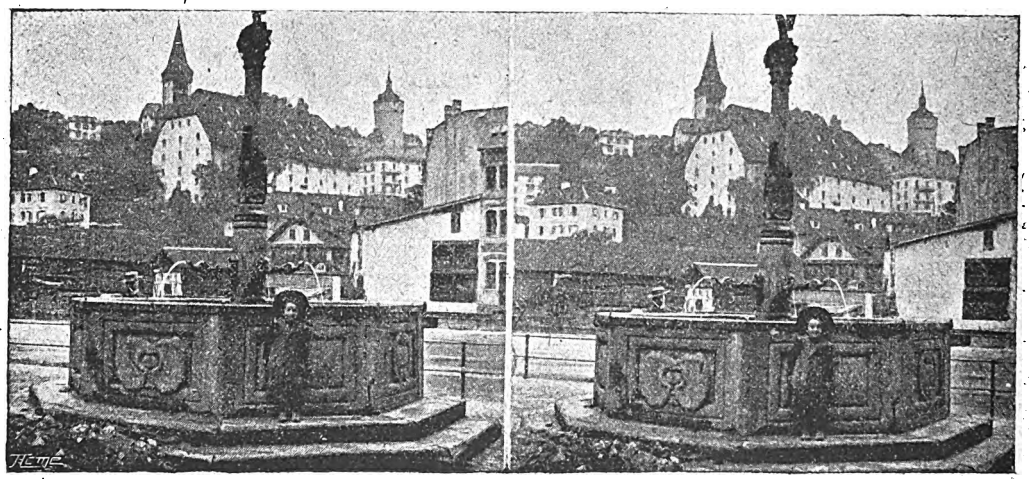
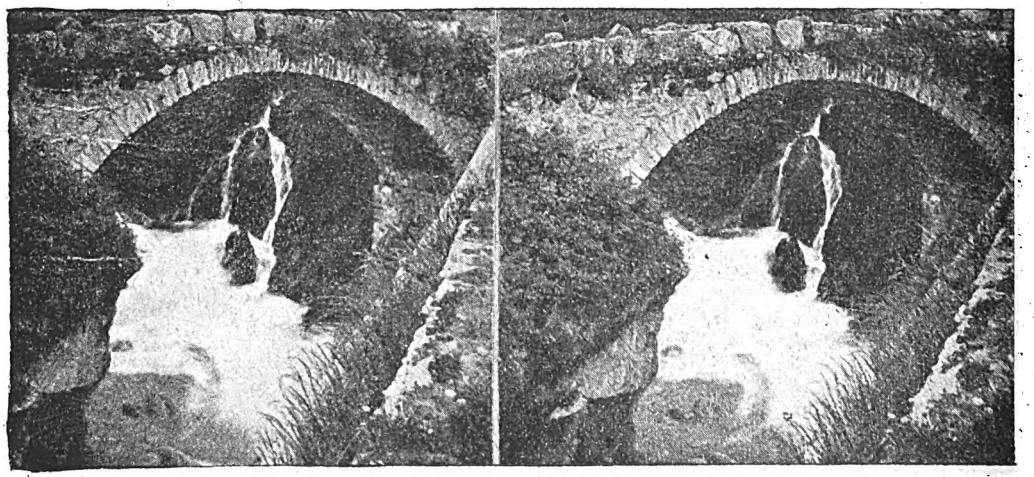
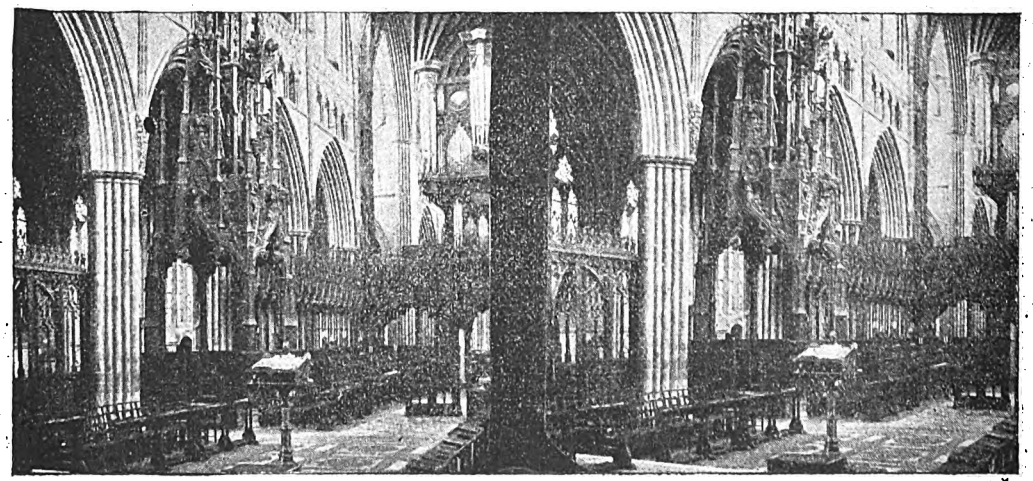
. Our Stereoscopic Gallery. .



At the Drinking Fountain.



A Scene in Switzerland.



Interior of a Cathedral.

To be cut out and looked at through a stereoscope, which can be supplied by *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., for 2s., post free.

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I KNEW that it was wrong when I did it, and if I hadn't known it at the time, I should soon have found it out from Maria, for she didn't forget to talk about it.

I put a little stress on "talk," just so that you should understand what I mean. Maria is a good wife, but—— Well, never mind; she isn't the only one who has that failing.

I was in the employ of a job-master in the suburbs and I had been sent with a closed carriage to take a lady and gentleman to some sort of a reception in town.

As it happened, they were not coming all the way back, I had to drop them at their daughter's on the way, where they intended to stay all night. So I was driving home empty, and taking my time about it, as the job was over before we had expected.

As I was trotting quietly along an almost deserted side street I was suddenly hailed, and, turning to find out who it was, I saw a young woman standing on the kerb of the opposite pavement with her hand raised to attract my attention. It was growing dark, but I could just distinguish enough of the features to notice that she was agitated.

I pulled up, fancying that there might be a chance of doing a little job on my own account. That's what I meant about knowing it was wrong; I ought not to have taken a mean advantage of my master's property to earn a few shillings privately, but that sort of thing is done occasionally and I don't profess to be any better than other men. She came across the road with a long stride that made me wonder whether she was a performer in a circus or something of that kind, and I expected her to tell me to drive to some theatre in town. I was reflecting whether I could do it or not when she reached me.

"You are empty," she said quickly. "I want you to drive me away from here as fast as you can." She opened the door while she was speaking.

"I'm a private conveyance," I objected rather lamely, "and I don't know that I can take you. Where do you want to go to?"

"Anywhere! My relatives are trying to get me put away in a mad house. I've just escaped and they are after me. Drive me anywhere so as to throw them off the track, and then you can drop me or take me to the railway station. I'll give you £5 if you'll drive me about for ten minutes to help me to escape these wretches."

She spoke just as fast as ever, gave a quick look towards both ends of the street, and then got into the carriage without waiting for me to answer.

"Jump in!" I said, but I don't believe she heard me, for she must have been inside by that time.

I noticed that she had a small bag with her, so I concluded that she had scraped a few things together and bolted.

Things are managed in a better way now-a-days, but at the time I'm speaking about, you could get a person into a mad house with very little trouble. I had read a good deal about those places, for I had been brought up for something better than carriage driving and was fairly well educated.

So you can understand that when I had a chance of helping a victim to escape from those who would have condemned her to such a fate, I was eager to do the job, even if I didn't get anything by it.

I touched my nag with the whip and off we went. As I turned the corner I heard a shout at the other end of the street and I also thought I heard hasty steps. I didn't dare to turn my head to see what was on; I guessed that it was the young lady's relatives in pursuit. I chuckled at the idea of them trying to overtake us on foot.

"I'll soon take her out of their reach!" I muttered, and I set the horse to a run.

But I was not to throw them off so easily. I passed a cab as I rattled through the next street and a suspicion crossed my mind about what would happen. I was right, for they hired that cab and came after me helter-skelter. My horse was in good condition and so was cabby's, judging by the way he stuck to me. But I was determined not to be done in my endeavour to secure justice for the oppressed, so away we went and we had a fine chase for about ten minutes.

I went down this street and through that, doubling and using all my skill in driving and all my knowledge of the district in order to throw them off. I went bolt

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across a main thoroughfare at the risk of a collision, making two carts pull up short and provoking a select specimen of bad language from the drivers, but I gained at least a minute by it, so I did not care. I wonder we were not stopped, but our pursuers did not raise a hue and cry, contenting themselves with chasing us in the hope of overtaking their quarry.

I got a good start of them in the end, and believed that I had lost them, so I pulled up a little and let the animal go easy. Suddenly my fare called out to me to stop, then opened the door and stepped out.

I nearly dropped the reins in surprise when I saw a young man, clean shaven and rather feminine in appearance, shutting the door behind him.

"Here are five pounds for you, Jarvey," he cried, holding out his hand with five sovereigns in it. I could just distinguish the coins, and the man's face was lighted up by the carriage lamp. "You drive on and let them follow you, while I take another road."

"And the young lady, sir?" I asked under the belief that he must have got into the carriage on the near side while I was talking to her on the off side. I couldn't explain it any other way.

"Oh, she's all right!" he replied with a laugh. "My get-up is pretty good, eh?"

And then he was off, and it dawned upon me that she must have had that suit ready to make the change, or was wearing it under her dress. But how did that agree with the story about the escape? Perhaps she had been wearing it under her dress all day, or for a day or two, waiting for a chance. I was puzzled, so I shook the reins and went on again.

But this stop had given the others a chance and they soon caught up with me, they could not have been so far off as I had thought.

Two men jumped from the cab at the risk of breaking their legs and a third sprang from the box as soon as cabby pulled up and caught hold of my bridle.

There was a rare hubbub and excitement for a few seconds.

An elderly gentleman yelled at me to move at my peril, and the other two shouted orders and threats until I hardly knew where I was. Then the elderly gentleman and the other man, one on each side of the carriage, opened the doors.

A dead silence followed, then the old gentleman carried on in a way that would have made Maria's hair stand on end.

That's what I tell her when she takes the old gentleman's part, as she always does, saying that it was only natural he should be annoyed and— But let us get back to the story.

He pulled out from the carriage a woman's dress and some false hair and held it up for me to see. I was astonished and annoyed as well, for I thought it rather mean of that young girl to give me away by leaving things behind her. It wasn't any use, after that, for me to say that they had been chasing the wrong carriage and that I didn't know anything about the matter.

"Where is your fare?" roared he.

"He's gone," I stammered out. "He got out just round there," unintentionally flourishing my whip vaguely in all directions, "and went off somewhere."

"Then we've been chasing him, instead of her," groaned the old gentleman. "I thought I was after my daughter. I'm glad to find that she is not the thief! It's a clever trick! But we'll have them both! If we are so close upon him, we shall find her. We'll go to the railway station and see if she is waiting for him there, oh, my misguided daughter!"

Then, turning to me, he shouted:

"You shall smart for this! You have been helping a robbery. Don't you know the difference between a man and a woman, stupid?"

"Seems to me, sir, that there's a pair of us. You thought you were running after your daughter, eh? Don't you know your daughter from a man?"

I won't try to repeat what he said. After blackguarding me, taking the name and address of my master in order to report me and nearly making himself ill with excitement, they drove off again, towards the railway station as I afterwards discovered.

You can easily understand that I didn't feel at all happy. I had earned five pounds in about fifteen minutes, but I should lose my place and character, even if I didn't get into trouble for aiding and abetting a thief.

From what the father had said, I judged that some fellow—my private fare—was running away with a girl, and that he was using his opportunity to rob the father. All my ardour in the cause of justice was misplaced. I had reaped the reward of wrong doing.

I found that I was not very far from the place where I had picked up my fare, which shows how I had doubled. I was a little farther from home, that's all, and it was towards home that I now turned.

Have you ever noticed how swiftly events follow each other at certain times in your life? You may go for a year without any startling experience, and then you will have a whole crowd of adventures in one day. It never rains but it pours—you know the old saying. That's how it seemed to be with me on the day I'm speaking about.

I decided not to go through the street where I had picked up my fare, but to go round by another way—rather a longer way round. I suppose it was fate.

I was thoroughly dejected and I remembered afterwards that I was just walking along close to the kerb. A figure suddenly emerged from a doorway and came swiftly towards the carriage, saying in a tone of relief:

"I'm so glad you've come. I wondered where you had gone."

I pulled up mechanically. She stood on the kerb, quite close to a gas lamp, and hesitated whether to open the door or not.

The voice, the countenance, and the general appearance of the girl told me that she was more of a child than a woman, although I judged her to be about eighteen.

There are girls like that; they have been brought up at home, under the strictest supervision of parents and governesses who have kept almost everything worldly from them, and they are eager to see this outside world and easily led by a stronger mind which takes advantage of their innocence.

I was certain that this was the kind of girl before me now, and then it crossed my mind that I had fallen in luck's way—that here was a chance to retrieve myself.

"Were you expecting anybody, miss?" I asked very politely. "I was told that I had to pick up a young lady just hereabouts."

"Yes, yes!" she replied eagerly. "Where is Harry—I mean, where is he?"

"He was obliged to go on first," I continued, artfully

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trying to draw her. I felt sure of my ground now. "He had to dodge them, you see, but he's all right now. He said you would tell me where to drive you."

She trembled so violently that I thought she was going to fall, so I jumped off the box and helped her inside.

"They didn't catch him? Was my father very angry? Oh, perhaps I had better not go!"

"Oh, yes, you had better go," I said re-assuringly. "It will be all right."

Poor child! I could see that she had been misled, charmed by the dashing manner of "Harry," who was a good-for-nothing and making use of her to get money by hook or by crook. I summed it all up in my own mind. I wanted her to tell me where she expected to meet him, because I thought that would put me on the track and I might be able to get hold of him and detain him.

They were to meet at Willesden, where they intended to take the train for a little place in Wales. Believing that I was acting under Harry instructions, she told me this unhesitatingly. I mounted to my seat and drove off at a good pace.

Arrived at Willesden, she looked about for a young man. I got someone to look after my horse while I looked about for him. Just as I was thinking that he had given us both the slip, I saw him striding along the platform.

I made my way to the same platform, but the girl had seen him and was running after him. A train was standing there ready to start, and I saw him deliberately thrust her aside with such force that she reeled against the seat and fell on it, bursting into a flood of tears. He placed his hand upon the door of the carriage nearest to him and opened it, but now there was another diversion.

Two men rushed along the platform, shouting to the guard not to start the train, and they were followed by an elderly gentleman who was panting for breath. I recognised them by their voices and appearances.

Then there was tremendous confusion. Harry left the carriage door and darted down the platform on to the lines, followed by the two men, while the old gentleman went up to his misguided daughter and clasped her in his arms. I stood close by them.

What I heard then and afterwards put me in possession of all the facts. This girl had been brought up as I had supposed. The young fellow had been one of a party of amateur minstrels engaged to give a performance in the old gentleman's house at Christmas time, the girl had been attracted by him and he had noticed it, so he had set to work to win her affections for the sole purpose of getting money somehow or other.

He had arranged to elope with her, and the foolish girl had been delighted with the "romance" of the thing. She had left the house in accordance with his plan, which was that he was to disguise himself in one of her dresses and with a suitable make-up and enter the house as she left it, so that he might carry her portmanteau, which was too heavy for her. She was to wait for him at a certain spot and he would come up in a carriage.

He seized the opportunity to rob the place and carry off some valuable articles of jewellery and some money. By good luck the plan was partly upset by a manservant who had suspected something, and the robbery was discovered in time for the father and two friends to start in pursuit of the robber.

He went to Willesden, as originally planned, probably because it was near at hand and he wanted to get away. I am inclined to think that he really intended to take the girl with him, but pushed her aside because he had discovered that his pursuers were close upon him and he wanted to get into the train and be off.

Did they catch him? Yes and no. The two men went after him in the darkness down the line. Hunters and hunted were so intent on what they were doing that they did not take due precaution. A train was coming in at a great rate, in the darkness they appear to have thought that it was on the other metals, and that mistake was fatal to Harry. When he realised his danger it was too late, and he was knocked out of shape. His pursuers, being some yards behind, had just time to get out of the way.

That was the tragic end of my private fare and the termination of my adventures for that day. I nearly lost my place over it, but the old gentleman considered that I had done what I could to make amends and he interceded for me so that my master decided to look over it.

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New Serial.—Start To-day.

THE FATE OF MICHAEL STANDRIDGE

By HEADON HILL.

Author of "The Peril of the Prince," "Seaward for the Foe," "Guilty Gold," etc.

SUMMARY.

THE steamship *Trogan* is homeward bound from the Cape. On board is Michael Standridge, who is returning to England from the Kimberley diamond fields, in possession of the "Kimberley Elephant," the largest diamond found in the colony. On the ship is his half-brother, Simon Hoathley. On the way up the English Channel the latter steals into the miner's cabin with the intention of murdering him and obtaining possession of the diamond. The miner, however, is on the alert, and presents a pistol at the intruder's head. Knowing that Hoathley will make another attempt to secure the diamond, Standridge resolves to "blind the trail."

CHAPTER II. (*continued*).

"AND yet," thought Michael, "these games of his would be more easily understood supposing that by some means he has become acquainted with that old story. It doesn't follow that because I haven't told him, he hasn't heard it elsewhere. If he knows that I have a missing daughter somewhere, he must suspect that my first task will be to search for her when I reach England. That would account for his persistence and hurry to do the trick before I get on to the girl's trail. What is more, if he does know anything I shall have a job to shake him off when we land. He mustn't kill me, though, before I find Marion—and if I do find her, a nice legacy it will be to leave her Simon Hoathley's greed and hatred."

Michael's lamp had flickered to its socket, but the early June sunshine was pouring through the porthole now, and sounds of sweeping in the saloon showed that the stewards were up and about. Michael swung his long limbs over the side of the berth, and, reaching over for a coat that was hanging on the wall took from the pocket an almanac which he scanned diligently for some minutes, making several calculations on the cover with a stump of pencil.

"An hour after midnight the tide will be running out swiftly," he said to himself at last. "We should pass the Needles about that time, so I ought to be able to do it easy enough. I know every inch of that water so well, and I am as strong and hearty to-day as when I used to go duck shooting from Poole Harbour. It should be child's play in this calm warm weather."

His eyes ranged round the cabin, fastening first on the brand new trunk, which he had bought at Capetown to hold his scanty necessaries for the voyage, and then upon a few garments hanging on the rack. "There's nothing here of any value that I can't take with me," he thought. "I can easily get a refit for a pound or two at the first opportunity. Yes, I see no other way of shunting Mr. Hoathley, and it shall be done."

And then, after fastening round his waist a leathern pouch-belt, which he took from under his pillow, he dressed himself quickly and went on deck to enjoy the fresh morning air.

At the western entrance to the Solent, running out from the Hampshire coast to within a mile of the Isle of Wight, is a long spit of shingle, at the end of which Hurst Castle frowns grimly towards the Needles and the open sea. Through this narrow strait passes all the shipping bound to or from Southampton westward, and the state of the soundings is such that large vessels have to be navigated much nearer to Hurst Castle than to the Wight. At the end of this natural causeway there are, in addition to the fortifications, a couple of lighthouses and a Lloyd's signal station, whence the names of passing vessels are telegraphed to headquarters. The nature of the work done at this lonely telegraph office, whose threshold is rarely crossed by any but the operators, demands that it should be open night and day.

It was between one and two in the morning when the man on duty had his attention called, by the deep organ tone of a steam syren, to a passing vessel whose combination of red and green signal lights proclaimed her to be the *Trojan*, homeward bound from the Cape. At the rate she was steaming, she would be up at the docks in a little over an hour, and by the time the signalman had finished his despatch, she was well on her way in the last straight run for Southampton Water.

* * * * *

The signalman lit his pipe and set about brewing himself a cup of coffee on an oil stove. As the water began to boil, he heard the crunching sound of footsteps on the shingle outside, and a moment after the door of the office opened, and a man stood in the entrance, dripping from the crown of his uncovered head to his shoeless feet, coatless, and rather out of breath, but otherwise not much the worse for an evident struggle with the sea. The signalman was too astonished to be the first spokesman.

"Can you lend us a hat and coat, and a pair of boots, mate?" asked the stranger, as coolly as though he had walked into a second-hand clothes' shop at midday. "I've met with a bit of an accident, you see."

The signalman pulled himself together at the matter-of-fact tones of his visitor's voice.

"Come in," he said, with quick, rising sympathy. "Come in and make yourself comfortable. I daresay I can fix you up in dry things. How did it happen?"

"All through a wager, friend," said the stranger, "and it ought to be a warning to me, at my time of life, not to indulge in such antics. I hail from Boscombe, d'ye see, and I staked a ten-pound note that I'd row a shore-boat to Cowes and back in twenty hours. I fetched up at Cowes

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all right, and I was slipping homewards gaily with the tide, when I got into the wash from that big steamer that passed awhile ago. My boat capsized and sunk, and I had to swim for it—that's the whole story."

"Well, you take take it pretty calmly," said the operator as he rummaged his locker for dry clothes. "How will that suit you—and that, and these?" he added, tossing over various articles of attire, all too small for the burly frame of the waif from the sea. The stranger selected a coat and hat, and after a struggle, managed to cram his feet into an old pair of house slippers. He positively declined to change his shirt and trousers, excusing himself on the grounds of difference in size, and protesting that his own would dry on him in an hour or two.

"I'm tough, friend; I bean't come to harm," he said. "And now just two words with you before I go. First, you must let me pay for these things. I might forget to send them back."

He took five sovereigns from his trouser pocket, and laid them on the table, silencing the man's faint disclaimer with a wave of his hand.

"Secondly," he went on "keep this dark, will you, like a good fellow? I should be so confoundedly chaffed about it if my upset was put in the papers, or got round in any way, and I want to pitch my own yarn my own way—you understand."

"That will be all right," replied the signalman; "it's few we see to talk to at this outlandish place, and I shan't say anything. You will sit down and rest awhile, now, won't you?"

But the stranger would not be persuaded. He had no need of rest, he said. He would prefer to push on by the military road that led along the spit to the mainland, and thence to Milford, where he could take train. So, after drinking a cup of hot coffee, and with a hearty "good-bye," he departed from the office, and was seen in those parts no more. The signalman had little leisure for newspaper reading, and it is not likely that he ever saw the following paragraph, or that, if he did, he connected it with his midnight visitor. It appeared two days later, and ran thus:

"During the passage of the Union Line steamer *Trojan* up Channel, one of the saloon passengers is supposed to have fallen overboard, and to have been drowned. He was not seen after the ship had entered the English Channel about five in the afternoon, and he was nowhere to be found when the vessel was docked at Southampton. The unfortunate gentleman's name was Standridge, and it is understood that he had been a successful miner at the diamond fields."

As Michael sat waiting at the little wayside station at Milford in the early summer morning, an object of wonder in his ill-fitting clothes to the solitary porter, he chuckled pleasantly to himself: "I've blinded the trail, Simon; I've blinded the trail."

When it is picked up again, God help you, Michael Standridge!

CHAPTER III.

A Good Bargain.

On the ground floor of one of the dingiest of the dingy houses in Hatton Garden are the business premises of Messrs. Strauss and Lightfoot, diamond brokers and dealers in precious stones.

After entering frem the street, a door on the right of the passage takes you into the front room, better known as the clerk's office, and through which it is necessary to pass in order to reach the partners' private sanctum in the rear.

In the front room a young man was sitting on a high stool before a desk. His back was covered with a well-fitting coat, and he had very shiny, straight black hair, cut short; but for the moment his features were invisible, because of the nature of his present occupation.

The flap of the desk, upon which lay a heavy ledger, was open to an angle of forty-five degrees, and was supported in this position by his head and shoulders, which were, therefore, to all intents and purposes, inside the desk. This was Mr. Swinley Tasker, sole clerk and general factotum of the house of Strauss and Lightfoot, whose business transactions being considerable in amount rather than in numbers made it unnecessary for them to geep a costly staff.

It was ten o'clock on a bright morning in early summer, and the air which came through the open window was instinct with the sounds of life. The Hatton Garden sparrows were twittering to their rivals away in Ely Place, and the Ely Place sparrows were gossipping loudly back. Knowing birds, these last, and wise in their generation; for have they not access to Sir George Lewis' window sill?

And, besides the sparrows, there were the ordinary street noises—the roll of heavy vans, the tinkling crash of a piano organ at the public house round the corner, and the

"I'm considered a judge of stones, if you have anything pretty to show us," insinuated Tasker.

strange cries of office boys on errands bent—all increased at this of the day by the tramp of portly Dutch merchants coming to business, and by the rattle of hansoms bringing those who were lazy or in a hurry. So it was that, what with all this busy hum and the absorbing claims of his occupation, Mr. Tasker failed to catch the sound of a well-known footstep in the passage, and that it was not till the door handle was turned that he became aware of an arrival. At this point the angular arrangement of the desk-flap justified its utility. Mr. Tasker's head and shoulders were swiftly withdrawn, and the flap, with its superincumbent ledger, was deftly lowered to its accustomed place, the little transformation scene having the effect of presenting to Mr. Light-

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foot as he entered the welcome sight of a studious clerk bending over his work.

"Good morning, Tasker," said the junior partner, as he passed through to his room behind. "Hard at it, I see. Come in, please, and see if there's anything in the letters this morning requiring your attention. Mr. Strauss does not return from Amsterdam till to-morrow."

The clerk swung himself off the stool and followed his employer into the private office. When he first looked up at Mr. Lightfoot's pleasant greeting, his face wore a responsive smile, which, however, faded quickly, as soon as the other's back was turned, into a look of abstraction almost amounting to boredom or weariness.

Mr. Swinley Tasker had regular features and a swarthy complexion, with no particularly dominating expression by reason of the variety of changes which asserted themselves in his countenance. He seemed to have an expression ready at command to meet the requirements of the occasion and the mood of those he found himself with. If he was talking to a sad man that man's sadness was not half so sad as the gloom reflected in Swinley Tasker's melancholy eyes. If he was confronted by a jovial soul that man's joviality would be met at once and outshone by the beaming gaiety of Swinley Tasker's smile.

Thus it was that the diamond broker's clerk was a favourite, and accredited with a sympathetic nature—in certain circles which he affected.

Mr. Lightfoot deposited his bag and umbrella, and seating himself at the table, began to open the day's correspondence.

The two first letters he retained after perusal for his own attention, Tasker standing at his side the while, note-book in hand ready to take down any replies that might be wanted.

The third letter required such treatment, and Mr. Lightfoot gave his clerk the word to write from dictation. Glancing up to see if everything was in readiness, the diamond broker obtained, for the first time that morning, a full view of his clerk's face.

"Why, Tasker," he said kindly, "you don't look well to-day. What have you been doing to yourself?"

The young man certainly looked "seedy." His expression was all there—the proper business expression of respectful alacrity and eager attention—but the best controlled facial muscles cannot hide dark circles and pallid lips. There was a suspicion of shakiness, too, in the well-kept fingers that held the waiting pencil, and a blueness of chin which bespoke an omission to shave.

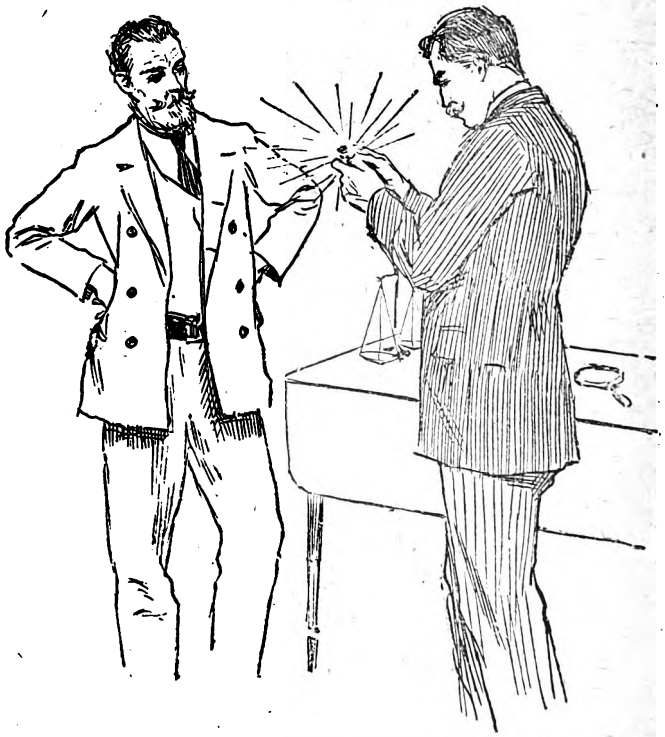
"I don't feel quite the thing this morning," he replied. "There was a very late meeting of the Y.M.C.A. at Exeter Hall last night, and after that I was at the bedside of a dying cabman. The poor fellow sadly needed consolation and advice. I got very little sleep in consequence; but I am quite able to attend to my duties. You know, sir, I never allow myself to be incapacitated for work even by—by the good cause."

"I shouldn't burn the candle at both ends, though, if I were you, Tasker," said the diamond broker. "A good cause, no matter what it may be, becomes a bad one when it makes a man look as chippy as you do this morning."

Mr. Lightfoot's approval of Exeter Hall, of its frequenters, and of its kindred enterprises, was well known, and this was the first time he had ever spoken so coldly about a "good cause"—the phrase was originally his own—which he had so much at heart. Till now he had almost seemed pleased to listen to accounts of his clerk's evening occupations in this direction. "Do I look so bad as all that, or is the governor going to backslide?" Tasker wondered to himself as he proceeded to take down the letter.

Other correspondence was dealt with, and the last letter in the pile was reached. Mr. Lightfoot scrutinised the envelope with the curiosity of a man who sees unfamiliar handwriting for the first time, and then broke the seal. The letter contained a few lines only, but from the first his interest was roused, and evidently increased line by line till he came to the signature.

As he read he shifted his chair, so that the clerk could not see over his shoulder; and when he had finished, he



It was a gem of great size, and even in its present rough condition, blazed with the true sparkle of its species.

tossed the envelope into the waste paper basket, but carefully folded the letter and placed it in his pocket-book. The only hint he let fall as to the nature of the communication, was to say that he expected a gentleman—a Mr. Thomas Wilson—to call on important business at twelve o'clock. Mr. Wilson was to be shown at once into the private room.

The clerk retired to the outer office to write the replies, and a few minutes later Mr. Lightfoot went out to keep an appointment, leaving word as he passed out that he would be back before twelve. Mr. Tasker wrote steadily for half an hour, and then, sticking his pen in the inkpot ready for emergencies, gently lifted the flap to its old angle, and buried his head once more in the desk. There was a newspaper spread out inside the desk, upon which he made frequent ticks with a stump of pencil, varying the performance by scrawling sundry figures on a scrap of paper. The vans and the street boys and the sparrows made more noise than ever, and so intent had the young man become on his occupation that this time the opening of the door failed to

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rouse him, and it was not till the sound of breathing close by caught his ear that he knew that he was not alone. The desk flap was lowered in a hurry, and Tasker turned to find a stranger standing at his elbow.

"Well, sir, what can I do for you?" said the clerk. "You startled me—coming in like that," he added, with a touch of protest in his tone.

"I beg your pardon," explained the other. "You took no notice when I spoke. I thought that thing had fallen on your head and stunned you. Are you one of the firm? My name is Wilson—Mr. Thomas Wilson—and I am expected, I think."

"No, sir, I am not one of the partners; but Mr. Lightfoot will be here by twelve o'clock to see you as arranged," replied Tasker, who had recovered himself now, and was searching Mr. Thomas Wilson's face for some clue to his character and business. Swinley Tasker didn't like secrets that were kept from him by his employers, and the letter which the junior partner had pocketed was piquing his curiosity. But the firm's new client showed no disposition to enlighten him.

"I reckon I'll sit down, then, till the boss comes in," he said, suiting the action to the word. "I'm a trifle before my time, I see."

"I'm considered a judge of stones, if you have anything pretty to show us," insinuated Tasker, twisting round on his stool, and adopting his confidential and trusted-adviser expression.

"Thank ye, friend, I've nothing worth so much as your valuable time," replied the stranger, with a Sphinx-like glance at the young man's desk. "Don't let me be hindering you."

Tasker, who never resented a snub in business hours, turned to his desk again, devoting himself now to the letters upon it—not to the newspaper inside. The visitor, a large man of rugged features and somewhat colonial appearance, sat and watched him with an air of contemptuous amusement, now that his back was turned.

"Boss nearly due by the way the beggar works," Mr. Wilson thought to himself. "I wonder if they know of his little weakness. Not quite the thing in a shop where precious gems are dealt in—but there, it is no business of mine."

In a few minutes the junior partner came hurrying into the office, and on being informed by Tasker of the stranger's name, at once led Mr. Wilson into the private room.

"I am very glad that you have come to us," he said, when he had carefully closed the double doors. "I have a commission for just such a stone as yours must be, if it is true to the description in the South African journals. But, pardon me—if I remember rightly, the name of the fortunate finder was given as Standridge. I presume you have purchased the stone from that gentleman, for it is only yesterday I was reading of his having been drowned in the channel."

"Quite right of you, sir, to want to satisfy yourself that the 'Elephant' was honestly come by," replied the new client, with approval. "It confirms the good character I had of you from several old friends at Kimberley. They told me that your firm was the fairest dealing in the trade, and square and reliable all round. That is why I sought you out the moment I reached London, and your putting that question just now shows that I can safely trust you with a secret—an honourable secret. I am Michael Standridge."

And Michael—for he it was—proceeded to relate the circumstances of his disappearance from the *Trojan*, and the reasons which prompted him to take the unheard-of course of swimming ashore before the vessel reached port.

He omitted from his narrative all reference to his family history, and did not say that the man whose suspicious persistence he wished to evade was a relation; but he pro-

(*Continued on page 508.*)

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duced documentary evidence, soiled and stained with sea water, that clearly established his own identity.

The broker listened with the deepest interest, and concurred in the desirability of giving such an unpleasant companion the slip. He promised to preserve the strictest silence as to Michael's real personality, and pointed out that there would be no fear of the "Kimberley Elephant" being recognised, for, if the firm purchased it, it would be at once taken abroad to be cut and polished.

"Have you the stone with you?" he concluded, with natural eagerness.

Michael unslung his leathern belt, and, taking the "Elephant" from its pouch, placed it in Mr. Lightfoot's hand. It was a gem of great size, and, even in its present rough condition, blazed with the true sparkle of its species. Having weighed the diamond very carefully, and put it to the usual tests, the broker looked up at Michael and offered him twenty thousand pounds for it.

"That's about the market value, I imagine," said Standdridge; "it's yours at that figure."

Mr. Lightfoot took out his cheque-book, and wrote out a draft for the amount without more ado. "I am making this payable to Thomas Wilson," he said. "Shall I cross it upon any particular bank?"

"Yes," returned Michael, after a moment's thought; "make it Metropolitan and Counties, Reading, please. And you might note to address me there, care of the bank, in case you ever want to communicate with me. It is likely I may settle in the neighbourhood for a time."

The main business being thus settled, Michael produced some smaller diamonds which he also wished to dispose of. These were eventually bought for £380, and Michael expressed a wish that payment should be made in cash, so that he could have a supply of ready money to be going on with. To this the broker readily assented.

"I fear, though," he added, "that I must trouble you to call in a little later, as I shall have to send to the bank for the money. I shall not be here myself, as I have an important engagement, but if you will look in at three o'clock my clerk will hand you bank notes to the amount."

Michael promised to call at the appointed hour, and got up to take his leave. Mr. Lightfoot rose also to accompany his client to the street door, and as they passed through the outer office, where the clerk was busier than ever, the broker paused for a moment to say, "Before I forget it, Tasker, just make a note of Mr. Wilson's address—'care of Metropolitan and Counties, Reading.' I shall want you presently, by the way, to go to the bank for some notes, which you will hand to Mr. Wilson when he calls at three o'clock." Then the two men parted very cordially, for the bargain had been satisfactory to both of them, and no impression had been left on either side of undue advantage taken or received.

It was now past one, and Michael walked about the streets till he found a quiet restaurant, where he passed the interval of waiting over a simple meal, and in meditating on his plans for the future. The old idea still clung to him, that his erring wife might sooner or later have made her way back to her native place, and he meant to make that district his headquarters, at any rate for the present. His daughter, he reckoned, must be two or three and twenty years old by now, and if she was alive he meant to find her, now that he had resources at his command.

As to his wife, he seldom thought of her, and when he did it was as of one dead to him, and whom he never wished or expected to see again. All his affection had been transferred long ago to the little girl who had played at his knee in the old Dorsetshire cottage, and the haunting dread ever present in his mind was that "something would happen" to him before he could find her.

He took out the cheque he had received for the big diamond, and pored over it thoughtfully.

"What I have to do with all this cash," he said to himself, "is to put the bulk of it away so that Simon can neither steal it nor obtain it by fraud in the event of my death. The slippery devil may hit on my track again any day, and there is no end to his scheming. If it were lying in a bank I should never feel sure he wouldn't upset any will I might make, and get hold of the stuff as next of kin. The best that can happen to the cash is to disappear. I would rather it lay idle for ever than let Simon stand a chance of benefitting by it."

So he sat and pondered till it was time to go back to Hatton Garden to receive the balance due to him. When he entered the offices of Strauss and Lightfoot he was, evidentally expected. Mr. Tasker was fingering a little pile of notes which lay before him on the desk. Wearing his most courteous and deferential expression, the clerk at once invited "Mr. Wilson" to come forward and write a receipt for the amount.

"I thought you would like it in small notes, sir," he said as Michael laid down the pen, "I have got fifteen twenties, three tens, and ten fives," and he proceeded to count the notes after the manner of bank clerks, keeping his left hand on the corner of the pile and turning up the corner of each note in succession with the forefinger of his right hand. He performed the operation with ostentatious slowness, as though he desired to save Michael the trouble of acounting the notes himself by letting him see that the mount was correct.

"That's it, then, sir," he concluded; "fifteen twenties are three hundred, and three tens are three thirty, and ten fives are three eighty—three hundred and eighty pounds," and he deftly folded the notes into a bundle and passed it to Michael, who had been standing at his side watching the value of each note as it turned up. The latter held a great yawning pocket-book open and ready to receive the money, and Tasker made a rapid gesture from the notes towards the pocket-book, as though tacitly suggesting that they had better be promptly committed to their proper receptacle.

But Michael Standdridge did not do that. He kept the bundle of notes in one hand, and the pocket-book in the other, and regarded the clerk with the same look of contemptuous amusement he had accorded to him before. There was that in the old miner's look which would have boded trouble to a ricketty conscience, but he spoke very quietly:

"Young man," he said, "I was once in a saloon at Golden City in the Black Hills—a new camp it was, in those days, and things were a bit rough, specially in that saloon. I broke my rule that night, and played faro till all was blue, and, what's more, I won. The chap that held the bank was a broken-down lawyer from the States, and he had to pay me a matter of five hundred dollars. He counted out the notes—ten-dollar notes they were—much the same as you did just now; obliging like, in front of my nose, so as to save me the trouble, he said, in counting them over again. But I noticed that the notes were all turned different ways, and I did count them over again, and I found that a lot of the notes had been cut in two, and the halves made to do duty as whole ones. I should have been about two hundred out on the deal, and there had to be shooting before the matter was settled. Now, I noticed just now that three of these notes were turned different ways to the main bulk—a twenty, a ten, and a five—and I'm open to bet that I'm thirty-five pounds short on what you've given me."

Swinley Tasker's dark face had taken a leaden hue; he held out his hands for the notes.

"Shall I tell you why I am certain of it?" proceeded Michael, disregarding the motion. "Because," he went on grimly, "when I find a young man who displays religious sentiments in his place of business"—Michael pointed to a framed text hanging on the front of the desk—"when I find such a young man uses his employer's time to pick out the winners in a sporting newspaper, and to calculate the odds on a horse-race, as you were doing this morning, I

(*Continued on page 510.*)

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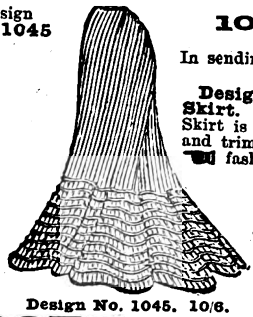

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come to the conclusion that that young man's got a screw loose somewhere, and when he hands me notes in precisely the same way as a rascally gambler in a camp saloon I further conclude that the young man is a wrong 'un.

"Not so fast," proceeded Michael as Tasker again essayed to speak. "I'm going to give you a chance. If you like to take these notes again and hand them back to me right, well and good. I don't want to ruin you for the try on. Or if you prefer that I should examine them now, just as they are, I will do so; and if they are right I will make you a present of two of the twenties. Which shall it be?"

Tasker's answer was to hold out a shaking hand for the notes.

With rude delicacy the old miner turned his back for a minute or two and looked out of the window till a faltering voice said;

"You will find them quite correct, sir."

Then he turned, and took the bundle for the second time.

Running through the notes carefully one by one, he looked up at Tasker every time he came to a note that had been recently joined—three had been so treated, one of each amount—and said, "Let this be a warning to you, young man."

And when he had verified the amount, and finally placed the notes in the pocket-book, Michael took Mr. Swinley by the ears, lifted him off the stool, and administered to him one scornful kick. Then he walked quietly out of the office, and was seen no more.

When his footsteps had died away, Tasker slunk into the private room and searched the waste-paper basket for the envelope of Mr. Wilson's letter. He found it without much trouble, and, carrying it to his desk, after a long scrutiny, locked it carefully away.

CHAPTER IV.

From Information Received.

Some way beyond the outskirts of Reading, on the main road that runs westward from the town, stands a pleasant villa residence, protected from the gaze of the too curious wayfarers by a high brick wall backed by a row of stately limes. The refreshing greenery of the tree tops behind the wall gives promise of a cool and shady garden within; and for those privileged to enter the neat iron gates the promise is amply fulfilled.

The house, known as "The Limes," is built back some fifty yards from the road, and the intervening space is covered with the typical pleasaunce of an English house. Inside the boundary wall is a tangled shrubbery, where in the springtime a wealth of laburnum and lilac contrast their gaudy colours with the foliage of the taller trees, giving place nearer the house to trim lawns and bright flower beds, with just a narrow strip between devoted to an old-fashioned rose garden sunk a few feet below the surrounding level, and cut off from a view of the windows by a hedge of yew. Here the standard rose-trees grew out of the mossy turf, marshalled in regular battalions, and almost crowding out the old stone fountain and rustic summer-house in one corner.

On a sunny afternoon in May a girl was sitting in the summer-house making believe to read a book that lay open on her knee, but in reality watching the gap in the hedge by which alone the rose garden could be entered.

A well-grown, healthy, brown-haired girl she was, with honest hazel eyes and a certain firmness about the pretty mouth and chin which gave a look of self-reliance to a face that was in all respects sweet and womanly. This was Michael Standridge's daughter, Marion, discovered by the merest accident only a week before.

It befell in this way.

After disposing of his diamonds, Michael carried out his first intention and went down to Reading—always with the same two objects in view; to find his daughter and to preserve her inheritance till she should be found. His first act was to pay the heavy cheque for £20,000 into the local branch of the bank; then he set to work to systematically hunt the town for traces of his wife and child.

This was a thankless task. His wife's mother had long been dead, and most of the neighbours who had known her were either dead also or had moved away; while the few who remained could tell him nothing of those he sought. His inquiries were the more slow and tedious because in his desire to obliterate his tracks he continued to use the name of Wilson, and it was not till after six weeks' hard work that he became convinced that there was really no information to be got.

But somehow he could not tear himself away from the neighbourhood. After a hurried visit of equally fruitless inquiry to his old house in Dorsetshire, he returned to Reading and looked about for a place in which he could devote himself to safeguarding his modest wealth in his own way, and which he could constitute a headquarters whence to extend his quest.

In his endeavours to find a house Michael was particular in his requirements. The house, he insisted, must be in the country—as far as possible from town or village—and it must be on a clay soil, and with at least a couple of acres of garden or paddock round it. The actual accommodation mattered little; so long as there was stabling for a pony he would soon put the place in order to suit himself.

The house agent to whom he applied happened to have on his books a dilapidated old farmhouse some seven miles from Reading, near a point where the main road westward is intersected by a country lane.

The house stood about a hundred yards up the lane from the high road, and from its position near the juncture was known as Kennett's Cross. Originally it had been the homestead of a farm, but a more modern residence had been built for the use of the farmer a mile away, and Kennett's Cross, with an acre or two of unprofitable land, had been in the market for years.

It was a desolate spot, with no other house for half a mile in either direction, and the building was in bad repair; but Michael, after looking round and turning up a few spadesful of bright yellow clay, bought the freehold right out for three hundred pounds.

When a waggonload of rough and ready furniture had made it to some extent habitable, Michael took up his abode in the old house, and returned, as an amateur to the occupation of his youth. His industry might have suggested the carrying out of a cherished plan.

From morning to night, and day by day, he delved and dug in the paddock, till he had provided himself with great heaps of thick yellow clay which he proceeded to bake into bricks in an extemporised kiln of his own manufacture. As soon as the first batch was finished he carried the bricks into the house; after which he drove his cart into Reading and withdrew from the bank a thousand pounds in gold.

Then he set to work to bake another batch, and when it was finished, again he drew a thousand pounds and carted it home to Kennett's Cross.

These two operations—the baking of bricks and the withdrawal of his money in gold—he continued to alternate till his balance at the bank got low, and folks began to talk of him a little as an eccentric. He made no friends, and the few acquaintances whom the exigencies of life forced upon him were told nothing of his projects; but at the same time he seemed quite careless of the obvious deductions people would be likely to draw from such of his strange proceedings as got about. Indeed once, when he overheard himself spoken of in an inn at Reading as a miser, he smiled with grim content at the imputation.

(To be continued.)

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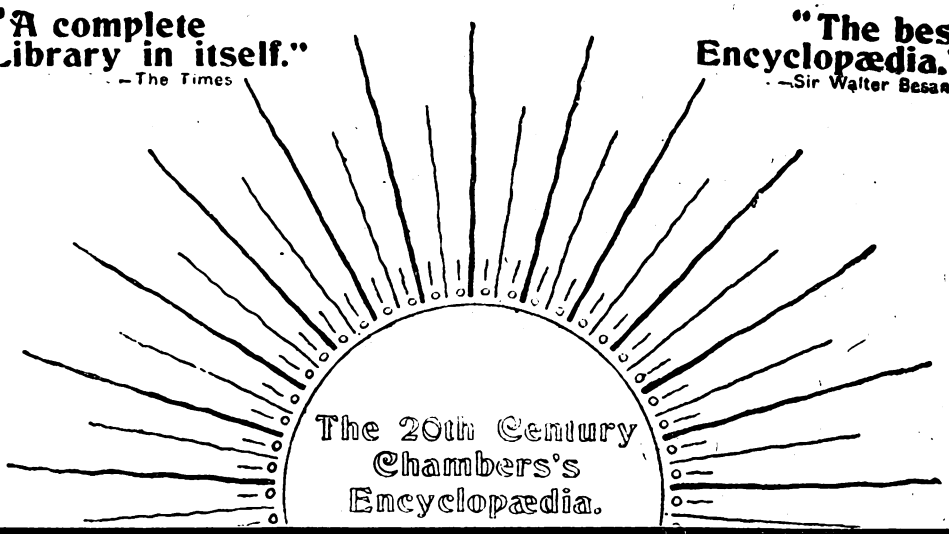

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

I HAVE just completed an hour's perfect enjoyment, and since we are friends, and friendship implies the offer to others of a share of our happiness, I will tell you the nature of my recent pleasure. I have been reading a story—no new thing with me. But in this case the story is of a particularly entrancing kind. It is entitled, "Who Killed James Trent?" and is appearing in serial form in—yes, for your sakes I will overcome my feeling of professional envy, and tell you that it is appearing in PEARSON'S WEEKLY. My friend the editor of that paper is, I notice, offering the really useful sum of £100 to the reader who discovers the murderer and the method of murder. It is no easy task, I assure you, but you ought to try it, nevertheless. However, quite apart from the question of the prize, the story is thoroughly well worth perusal.

THE astounding adventures of "A Keeper of Secrets," which Mr. Norman Silver is writing for us, are becoming familiar to the whole world. A remarkable proof of this is shown in the fact that a lady the other day sent from Walsall a letter addressed, "Hugo Pontifex, Esq., London." It says much for our postal system that this vaguely directed epistle was delivered at *Short Stories* offices the next day.

"MAUD" (Cheltenham) is "tired to death" of life behind a draper's counter. She sighs for a change, and longs to become an actress. How, she asks me, can she accomplish her desire.

My emphatic advice, "Maud," is: Don't try. Doubtless, to one as inexperienced as you are, the life of an actress teems with attractions, beautiful dresses, a big salary, and the applause of the people. But stage life isn't always—it isn't even *generally* that. The "big salary" for a beginner may mean a pound a week, out of which the "beautiful dresses" must be bought. The fact is, the dramatic profession is very much overcrowded. Glance at the theatrical papers, and notice how many well-known, capable, and even distinguished Thespians are seeking engagements. A prominent actor-manager once told me that four months' work per year is as much as the average actor or actress can expect. Don't be an actress, "Maud."

"GEORGE D." has a peculiar experience to record. For some years he went in for bell-ringing, and ever since he has been periodically troubled with peculiar noises in his head which sound like "a muffled campanological peal." He asks me if I have ever heard of a similar case.

I don't think I have. Other men, however, are occasionally haunted by their pursuits. Proof-readers often find it difficult to read merely for amusement; they feel impelled to look out for errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. One professional billiardist, at any rate, finds it difficult to sleep after a long spell of play, because the click and run of the balls keep sounding in his head. I myself remember when, many years ago, I was an enthusiastic student of shorthand, how difficult it was to hear anybody talk without making a mental verbatim report, that is, tracing the proper shorthand signs for what the speaker was saying, in my mind. Perhaps my readers can furnish other examples.

"T. G. C." (Streatham).—Somebody has been "having you on toast." Laughing does not cause the disease you mention, nor any other, for that matter. On the contrary, laughing promotes health. A well-known doctor once wrote on the subject:

"There is not the remotest corner or little inlet of the minute blood vessels of the human body that does not feel some wavelet from the convulsions occasioned by good, hearty laughter. The life principle of the central man is shaken to the innermost depths, sending new tides of life and strength to the surface, thus materially tending to insure good health to the persons who indulge therein. The blood moves more rapidly, and conveys a different impression to all the organs of the body, as it visits them on the particular mystic journey when the man is laughing, from what it does at other times. For this reason, every good, hearty laugh in which a person indulges tends to lengthen his life, conveying, as it does, new and distinct stimulus to the vital forces."

"ELTHAM" is going abroad in three weeks. He is engaged to the best little girl in the world, and wants to know whether I think he would be justified in marrying her before he starts. He will be away for two years, and thinks that it would be nice to feel that he has a little wife waiting at home for him.

Very nice, maybe, "Eltham," but not very considerate or kind. It is one thing to go away and leave your *fiancée* behind, but quite another matter to leave your wife. Once married, she has the right to go with you wherever you go, and it would not be fair to leave her alone; you can never tell what will happen to you in that time; you might die, and she would be a widow, though she never really was a wife. Give up all ideas of matrimony until you come back. Two years is not a lifetime.

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I AM open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 4,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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...e Industry.

...NTY-FIVE years ago an attempt was made in the village of Histon, near Cambridge, to solve the problem, how to make land pay in the face of foreign competition? The country was then at one of its educational epochs. We were being taught the vast food and health value of fruit. Incidentally, also, we were slowly gaining the knowledge that pure sugar, properly treated, was one of the greatest nutrients, in a small compass, with which man has been blessed. Further, that sugar and fruit in combination—when the latter is fresh, ripe, and luscious—makes a most valuable addition to our daily dietary, especially to that of children. The firm gradually expanded until they are now the largest fruit-cultivating jam and jelly makers in Great Britain. The watchwords have been *pure and fresh material*, with the most positive cleanliness in the manufacturing processes. And

as Chivers' Gold Medal Jellies are prepared from the best obtainable materials, and as their delicious flavours are real fruit juices expressed by the firm themselves from fruit grown under their own care, one cannot wonder that Chivers' Gold Medal Jellies have the largest sale and greatest popularity. The *Ladies' Realm*, April, 1900, says: "Chivers' Jellies will be found most welcome delicacies, and are thoroughly nutritious, wholesome, and easily digested." A Lady writes: "We use no other Jellies in this household, having found out their superiority to all others." Another Lady says: "Without a fault—simply perfection."

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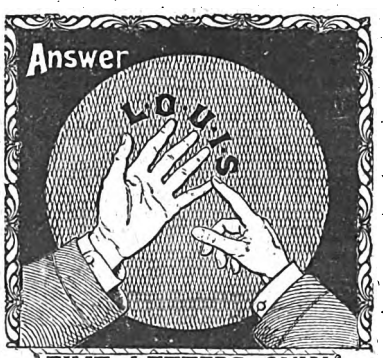

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No. 643) For Week Ending April 27th, 1901. (One Penny.

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1000	Gents' Umbrellas, 15s. each	750	0
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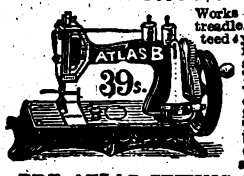

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 643.] For the Week Ending April 27th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

A Keeper of Secrets

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Being Days in the Professional Life of the late Mr. Hugo Pontifex, the Famous West-end Solicitor.

To those who had only met him casually in Society, the late Mr. Pontifex was a good-tempered mystery. Bluff, handsome, and, in spite of his middle-age, a little of a dandy, he seemed the last man in the world to deserve his reputation, which was that of the keenest, most audacious, and unerring of family lawyers. Fair-haired, and powerful as an athlete, his striking appearance was increased by his eyes, one of which was grey and one blue.

In reality, however, Hugo Pontifex had a wide and almost exclusively aristocratic practice. He seldom briefed a barrister, seldom set foot in a court of justice, but single handed he hunted down, captured, and safely buried mystery after mystery of terrible import to Mayfair and Belgravia.

An expert in strangling scandal, he lived a life of enthralling interest, and died a rich man. When his executors went through his papers they found nothing to satisfy their curiosity, though plenty to excite it. Hugo Pontifex knew the value of fire—and the dangers of ink. But from time to time he related to the writer, who enjoyed a certain measure of his confidence, the incidents which form the basis of the following stories. In speaking of these strange fragments of drama, Mr. Pontifex himself employed fictitious names, the present author being left to guess vainly at the identity of the genuine actors.

HIS LORDSHIP AND THE DANCER.

ELEANOR COUNTESS OF STANTON first visited Mr. Pontifex one pleasant afternoon in May. It was not yet four by the little gilt timepiece on the lawyer's writing-table, but his client was attired in all the glory of full dress, with a sweeping court-train of black velvet and a coronet of diamonds upon her silver tresses. She had driven round by St. James' Street to interview the great solicitor on her way from Buckingham Palace and the most brilliant Drawing Room of the season.

The Countess was an imposing figure, though her height was diminished by a marked tendency to stoutness and by a limp that necessitated the aid of the ebony stick with which she walked. Mr. Pontifex bowed her to a seat, into which she sank with the air of an empress—Eleanor, Countess of Stanton came of a line that quartered the Royal Arms of England with their own.

"Mr. Pontifex," she said gravely, "you may well marvel at receiving a call from me, without notice and in this costume. But the truth is that the matter upon which I desire your advice and assistance has unexpectedly reached a crisis. At the Drawing Room to-day it was being openly reported that a breach of promise action against my son, the Earl of Stanton, was about to be initiated by—by Miss Cora Shaw, of the Regency Theatre."

The lawyer's singular eyes rested sympathetically upon the proud face of this aristocratic dame in the carved-oak chair. The delicate features of the Countess were sad yet determined. There was the sensitive strength of high breeding in every line of the still handsome countenance.

"I presume," answered Mr. Pontifex, looking thoughtfully into the splendid sapphire of his ring, "that there is some foundation—however trifling—for the rumour."

"There is," confessed the Countess, "for this woman, Mr. Pontifex—this Cora Shaw—my son, unfortunately, happened to conceive a romantic passion. An honourable passion," she added, sternly; "my son is a chivalrous gentleman. He saw her at the play, fell in love with her, obtained an introduction, and wooed her as loyally as if she had been of his own rank. He believed her to be, as he is, noble, generous, pure—she might have been all these, and yet have been on the stage; I am no bigot, Mr. Pontifex."

The solicitor surveyed his client. "You are extremely and unusually fair-minded, madam," he conceded.

"I even hoped," said the Countess, "she would prove all that Stanton imagined her to be, since I realized the probable futility of seeking to thwart his attachment. Nevertheless, when I learnt of Stanton's interest in her—for he was perfectly frank with me—I ventured on a few discreet inquiries. You will guess the result. Cora Shaw is an unprincipled adventuress, and known as such in every capital in Europe. Finally, a year ago, she went on the stage, and, with a single novel

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dance in the new comic opera at the Regency, has taken the town by storm."

"Your information," commented Mr. Pontifex, "is ample—and correct."

"Of course," continued his client, "I did not question either Stanton's candour or his intelligence. He was in love, and love blindfolds all of us. But I got together my proofs and laid them in Stanton's hands. The blow was cruel, Mr. Pontifex; hearts do not break, perhaps, but nerves snap frequently. My poor Stanton testified by a severe attack of brain fever, the depth of the devotion which he had felt for Miss Shaw."

The lawyer sighed, and began to twist the ornament

"I have achieved more difficult tasks," Pontifex replied.

on his finger. The late sunshine glimmered in its gem of glorious azure.

"During Stanton's illness," proceeded the Countess, "no communication of any sort was held with Miss Shaw. I fancied it wiser, not being quite certain what progress, if any, my son had made with his suit. Then, on his recovery, the doctors forbade any immediate reference to the subject. Not till a week or two back was I able to ask him if there had been any actual engagement between Miss Shaw and himself. To my alarm, he admitted that just prior to my disastrous discoveries he had proposed marriage, in a letter, and that she had accepted him."

"Verbally?" asked Mr. Pontifex, pausing in his contemplation of the sapphire.

"Verbally," assented his client; "is it of any importance?"

"It saves us the trouble of destroying a written response," declared the solicitor, coolly, "did you discover whether the Earl, in previous missives, had spoken of marriage?"

"He said not," answered the Countess; "they had been so much together that any correspondence took the form of brief notes, affectionate no doubt, but chiefly relating to appointments. Stanton did not offer her marriage in ignorance of the social catastrophe which he was challenging; he assured me that he had reflected carefully upon it, and that not till he was convinced of her sterling worth, did he, in the letter of which I told you, mention matrimony."

"We must positively have that letter," murmured Hugo Pontifex, and he gazed absently at the dial of the gilt timepiece on his table.

"To avoid a scandal," said Eleanor, Countess of Stanton, eagerly, "I will pay ——."

The lawyer interrupted her. "Pay nothing at all," he advised; "at least for such a foolish reason. Money may have to be spent as a part of a game whose success will effectively suppress the scandal you fear. But bribery is a confession of weakness; avoid it like the plague."

"I did not intend to suggest your bribing her," corrected his client coldly; "I meant that her claim for damages must, at any cost, be privately satisfied."

Mr. Pontifex smiled. "In that case," he said, "your own solicitors will serve your purpose admirably; I trust the astute Cora may not plunder you too unmercifully." And he reached towards the bell at his elbow.

The Countess bit her lip. "Sir," she rejoined, "you misunderstand me; I did not desire to dictate to you. I have every cause to study economy in this luckless affair. During his convalescence my son has been nursed by his cousin, Lady Lilian Ingram. The friendship, broken by Stanton's passion for Miss Shaw, has been revived, and, happily, has ripened into love."

The peeress paused and coloured slightly. "The match," she pursued, "has been my dearest ambition. Lady Lilian is, however, a daughter of the Marquis of Crosby, and we shall have to bring a considerable sum into the settlement. Yet a scandal over this Miss Shaw must be prevented, regardless of expense. Stanton has confessed all to Lilian, but her father, the Marquis, remains in ignorance. A law-suit might break off the marriage."

The lawyer drew a deep breath. His attention had been aroused. There was more at stake than he had imagined. To grapple with problems whose issues involved the peace and prosperity of famous families afforded him a peculiar delight. He paused for a moment. The Countess waited patiently.

"Madam," he decided, "I will deal with Miss Cora Shaw. In other words, I will secure that compromising letter, and definitely prevent her prosecuting her breach of promise action. To do so I shall merely require to spend some five hundred pounds; the pretty and unscrupulous dancer herself is probably estimating the loss of a coronet at twenty times the amount."

His client gasped. "You will work this miracle?" she cried.

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Mr. Pontifex rose. "I have achieved more difficult tasks," he replied; "as for the gossips, I should recommend that you announce, forthwith, the engagement of Lord Stanton to Lady Lilian."

"It shall be in the *Morning Post* to-morrow," the Countess said.

Hugo Pontifex had lost himself in a sudden reverie. "Audacity is the larger portion of success," he observed; "let your son and his future wife also appear to-night in a box at the Regency Theatre. The rumour of Miss Shaw's intention to appeal to the law will seem incredible in view of their joint presence at her performance."

The Countess of Stanton considered the idea. "It is a bold stroke, Mr. Pontifex," she demurred; "yet it shall be done—if we can get a box."

The solicitor lifted the receiver from his telephone and rang up the Regency Theatre.

A box was free, Mr. Pontifex ordered it to be reserved in the name of the Countess.

"That will set them wondering at the theatre," he concluded; "and now au revoir; I shall be at the Regency myself to-night."

"I trust you may enjoy your evening's entertainment," the Countess told him stiffly, as if to warn him that, great lawyer as he was, his movements were of trifling significance to her.

"I anticipate a truly diverting experience," said Hugo Pontifex, grimly, and showed his aristocratic visitor to her brougham.

As it bore away the haughty peeress Mr. Pontifex regained his comfortable apartment.

"Don't let me be disturbed," he called to his deaf clerk, and passing in, shut the door.

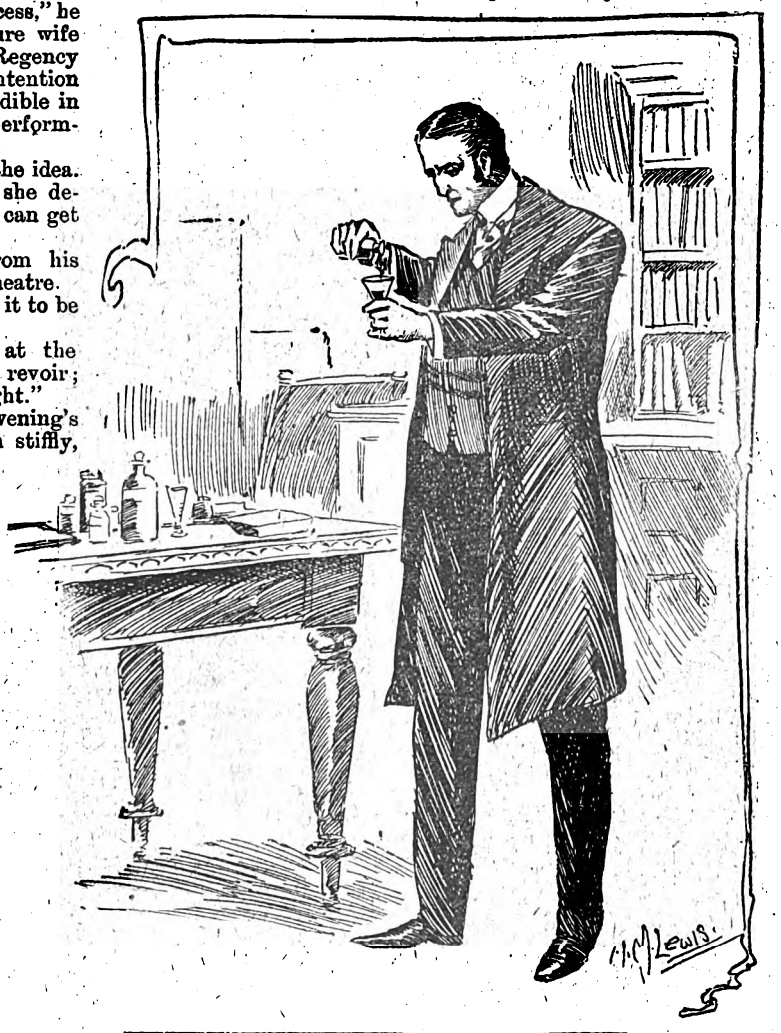
Then he approached the small safe of which he alone kept the key. Unlocking and opening it, he got out a tray of chemicals, and, at a leisurely rate, mixed several ingredients in a shallow dish.

The result was a dark fluid, much resembling ink. With this he filled the vulcanite barrel of a fountain-pen—a pen decorated pretentiously by bands of chased gold. Another pen of a rather similar pattern he charged with the ordinary blue-black fluid from a stone bottle. A shrewd spectator of these various processes would have noticed that there was a difference in the gold mountings of the two pens. For the rest, they were identical.

Stowing the prepared instruments in his vest pockets, the solicitor unfastened an inner drawer in the safe, and, producing a roll of notes, counted out a batch of twenty-five. The notes, being for twenty pounds each, represented a total value of five hundred—the exact sum of which he had made mention to the Countess. Mr. Pontifex secreted the packet of crisp sheets about his person, and, smiling meditatively, closed the safe and secured it.

For an hour afterwards he attended to his customary correspondence. Later, dress-case in hand, he walked to his club, where he dined peacefully. The meal finished, he changed into his evening garments, not forgetting to transfer to them his fountain-pens and the bulky package of notes.

Ultimately, the porter at the club whistled him a cab, and Mr. Pontifex entered it with an air of contentment which harmonized very creditably with his real emotions. Hugo Pontifex was seldom in such good humour with himself as on the edge of those curious gambles whose chances he fathomed so unerringly that he appeared to control them.



At a leisurely rate he mixed several ingredients in a shallow dish.

He alighted at the stage entrance of the Regency, tipped its surly guardian a florin, and desired that his card might be sent up to Miss Shaw. On it he had inscribed his profession and the diplomatic words "Re a legacy." It is not an easy matter to interview a popular actress a few minutes before the rise of the curtain.

The door-keeper looked critically at the pasteboard

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and delivered it to a sharp lad, who, in his turn, scrutinized Mr. Pontifex's message as he lounged with it into the dusky corridors of the house. When the latter returned it was with the request that the lawyer would follow him.

Mr. Pontifex, prompted now and again by his guide, stalked cautiously among the stumbling blocks of the wings, ascended a winding staircase and crossed a narrow threshold to find himself face to face with Miss Cora Shaw. She was tall and fair, with a Greek profile, sparkling brown orbs, dazzling teeth and a red and selfish mouth. Her short, full skirts and a big and nodding hat, showed that she was ready for her call. Her attendant—an elderly woman—was just closing the last button of an elbow-high glove.

"Well," demanded the actress; "and what good news is in the wind now, Mr.—Mr. Pontefract?"

"Pontifex," begged the solicitor smilingly; "and, if you have no objection, Miss Shaw, my business could be more expeditiously transacted in the absence of a third party."

"Tizeck," said Cora Shaw bluntly; "get out." The attendant obeyed, glancing inquisitively at Hugo Pontifex as she disappeared. The lawyer dropped into a chair by the actress' toilet-stand, got out his packet of notes and began to count them. Cora Shaw watched him impatiently, her eyes shining with ill-disguised greed.

"Twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five," he ended, fluttering the final sheet, "five hundred pounds in all."

The actress held out her hand, excitedly. "How nice!" she said, "but who is the kind soul that's left me the shekels?"

Hugo Pontifex restored the notes to his pocket. "You must pardon my fib about the legacy, Miss Shaw," he told her. "To be frank, this payment is merely in earnest of a much larger amount, and from a living, not a dead client. What would you say to a gift of ten thousand pounds?"

Cora Shaw broke into a scream of ecstasy. "Oh," she intreated, "tell me all about it, quick—I've to go on in a second or two."

"This ten thousand pounds, Miss Shaw," he began, but arrested himself to whisper to ask: "Can you guarantee us free from eavesdroppers?"

The actress crept to the door and peeped through the keyhole. "There is no one spying," she reported, "but you may speak low—other rooms adjoin mine."

Mr. Pontifex bent his head assentingly.

"This ten thousand," he continued, "is offered on her son's behalf by the Countess of Stanton, in reparation of Lord Stanton's breach of his promise to marry you."

Cora Shaw clapped her gloved palms.

"I thought I'd frighten them," she said, in her crisp American accent; "but see here, I only told my attorneys to go ahead this morning. They can't have fired a shot yet."

"The Countess heard a rumour and consulted me instantly," explained the solicitor. "A match is being arranged between the Earl and his cousin, Lady Lilian Ingram. Her ladyship is afraid of any scandal, and, though the estate really cannot bear the tax, I persuaded her to allow me to propose, on conditions, the lavish terms I have outlined. The conditions are that you do not betray the source whence you receive the money, that you authorize me to deny the report of a previous engagement between you and the Earl, and that you hand me over, at once, the epistle in which he offered you marriage."

It was blank. She uttered a cry of astonishment.

Cora Shaw knitted her brows; Mr. Pontifex produced casually his packet of notes and toyed with them.

"Five hundred down in exchange for that single missive," he said temptingly; "and the balance of ten thousand within a month. I merely stipulate that you shall instruct your legal advisers to abandon all proceedings against Lord Stanton. If you will oblige me with some letter-paper I will scrawl an agreement to that

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effect, and also one binding me to pay you the remainder of the ten thousand. Remember, if we fight you may lose."

There was a stentorian warning in the corridor. "Miss Shaw!—the stage waits for Miss Shaw!"

The actress caught up her cloak. "I'll do it," she said; "the call-boy shall get you some paper and I will send Tizeck for the letter. When I come off again we will fix it."

"You have an excellent brain for business," Mr. Pontifex responded, opening the door for her gallantly. She laughed, muttered a rapid order to her dresser, and hurried, a gaudy figure, along the dingy passage.

The elderly woman donned her hat and jacket and marched off, while a diminutive youth brought Mr. Pontifex a quire of the Regency letter-paper and the usual writing-materials. The lawyer settled himself to draft a succinct memorandum of the compact at which he had arrived. Previously to doing so he emptied the contents of the theatre ink-pot out of a window and took to one of his fountain-pens—that which he had filled with a special blend of chemicals. A briefer contract has seldom been seen than that evolved by Mr. Pontifex. It ran:

> I, Cora Shaw, in consideration of the sum of ten thousand pounds (£10,000) of which five hundred pounds (£500) is now paid, do hereby release William Godfrey, Earl of Stanton, from his promise to marry me.

He dated it and laid the small folio to dry, after inspecting closely his own characters. While it was doing so he wrote another:

> I, Hugo Pontifex, solicitor, of St. James' Street, London, W., do undertake, on behalf of William Godfrey, Earl of Stanton, to pay to Miss Cora Shaw, within one month from date, the sum of nine thousand five hundred pounds (£9,500).

Placing this by the first contract, he had recourse to his alternative fountain-pen, and partially covered with his neat caligraphy a third folio of the Regency letter-paper. He blotted this, folded it deliberately, and slipped it into the square cuff of his shirt-sleeve. The two earlier folios he left where they were.

These operations lasted for some twenty minutes, and then Miss Cora Shaw's quick step sounded without.

"Here we are," she said, holding up a letter for the solicitor to scan; "this is his lordship's bid for the Regency Belle, isn't he prim? Say, do you know he is in the front, with his mother, and—I reckon—my rival? Stennie's got a nerve to fetch her round. Not that I ever was gone on him—but I couldn't resist a coronet if a nigger wore it. Come, Mr. Ponti—what's-your-name—buy it back from me, and then Stennie can give it to who he likes."

The lawyer gave her the draft contracts to read. "They'll do," she sniffed; "I'll sign mine," and she looked for a pen.

"One moment," said Hugo Pontifex; "you must sign in the presence of a witness. Your dresser will do, I can fold over the sheet."

"What a lot of bother!" frowned the actress, but she went to call her attendant. In a twinkling Mr. Pontifex snapped up the first of the folios and substituted for it—folded—that which he had concealed in his cuff. Miss Cora Shaw appearing with the necessary witness, the solicitor gave her a fountain pen.

"Luckily I use one," he said; "there was no ink in the stand they brought me."

The actress took the instrument and appended her name to the bottom of the partly-folded sheet; then yielded the pen to her dresser, who signed underneath. Mr. Pontifex took the pen with a bow, and dashed off his signature at the foot of another sheet, the dresser witnessing that also in due form.

As this process terminated the lawyer glanced at the door, it seemed, expectantly. Nothing happening, he contrived to drop the signed folios on the floor and stooped to pick them up.

"Miss Shaw!" came a drawling summons, Mr. Pontifex was upright in an instant.

"Here are your notes, Miss Shaw," he murmured; "and here, in exchange for the letter, is my contract to pay the balance of ten thousand in a month."

His manner was curiously bustling and peremptory.

The call-boy's voice sounded again.

"The stage waits for Miss Shaw!"

The actress thrust the folded papers and notes into her corsage and hastened out of the apartment.

Hugo Pontifex sat down and laughed—to the wonderment of Miss Cora Shaw's dresser.

"I shall need to speak with your mistress again," he observed; "the act doesn't last much longer, I think."

"About a quarter of an hour, sir," said the attendant. "Have you seen the piece?"

"Fortunately, yes," answered the solicitor; "I may admit, *very* fortunately. I recollect perfectly Miss Shaw's exits and entrances." He got out his match-box, tore up the Earl's epistle and a couple of folios of Regency letter-paper, written on, and burnt them contemplatively.

"That is against the rules of the theatre, sir," objected the dresser. But Mr. Pontifex only smiled and gave her a sovereign.

Suddenly there was a patter of feet in the corridor—the act had ended. Miss Cora Shaw returned flushed and panting after a double encore.

"You still here!" she cried.

"I forgot a trifling detail," responded the lawyer. "A word in private and you will be rid of me."

The actress motioned to her attendant, and Hugo Pontifex was once more alone with the dancer.

"You have a paper in your bosom," he said, "oblige me by looking at it."

Puzzled, the actress drew out the folded document he had given her a quarter of an hour before.

"Open it," requested the solicitor. Cora Shaw obeyed. It was blank! She uttered a cry of astonishment.

"Listen to this," said Mr. Pontifex, opening a sheet of the Regency paper.

> I, Cora Shaw, do admit that there never was any contract of marriage between myself and Lord Stanton and, on condition that I am not prosecuted for slander, undertake that his lordship shall never be further troubled by me or my legal advisers.

"It is signed by you," commented the solicitor, "and witnessed by Mary Tizeck, your dresser. Miss Shaw I have the honour to wish you good-evening. You are five hundred pounds richer and I have made a bonfire of a dangerous missive bearing the Stanton monogram."

Cora Shaw glared at him, stupefied. The blank sheet dropped from her nerveless fingers. Mr. Pontifex picked it up, ripped it into shreds, pocketed them, and strolled out of the room.

* * * * *

The *Morning Post* of the next day contained the announcement of an engagement between the Earl of Stanton and Lady Lilian Ingram. And on the Countess' breakfast-table lay a laconic communication from Hugo Pontifex. "I have drawn the dragon's teeth—cost of gas, £500."

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SCARFSIDE.

To-day I, Grace Penton, am forty years of age, and I am a thankful woman. Whichever way I look, I see a happy prospect. A strong wall of love shuts me in, so that the cold blasts of what is, I know, a sorrowful world cannot chill my content.

Sitting by the fireside in the oak-pannelled parlour at Scarfside, with my husband's stalwart arm round me, and my two children at my knee, I am, I say it again, a happy and a thankful woman. But, that I may the more enjoy these present things, and be moved to show in the very deed the gratitude I feel, it is in my mind that I should write down some account of the troubles I (and he too) have seen; for things were not always so, and with us it was darkest before the dawn.

My earliest recollection is of a great open space surrounded by lofty buildings dimly seen through the darkness and fog; in the centre of it, a high column and wide pavements. Now I know that it was Trafalgar Square.

It was night, and the wind and rain swept roughly in our faces as we crept along, my father and I; and the plash of the fountains seemed the echo of the storm's cruel play.

I think I was crying; the cold pierced my limbs, for my shabby clothes were almost rags, though he sheltered me as well as he could with the skirt of his coat. I was hungry as well as cold; for I had been sitting, shivering, and waiting since middle-day, in a corner, as near as I dared to a chestnut-seller's fire, while my father called again at a great house in the crowded street hard by, where, so I hoped, he had friends who would help us. I have been taken there, since, and I was able to point out the very house on whose steps my father spent most of his last hours.

They told me that it was a famous club, to which he had once belonged, and he had gone there again in the hope of meeting some fellow-officer who would aid him for the sake of old days.

But it was Christmas-time, and many were out of town, and so none whom we knew passed the doors during those hours of waiting.

Times were changed; the servants were fresh, and did not know him; the house had no longer a welcome. And so late in the evening, he gave up the hope, and came back to me, and took my hand in his, and we plodded wearily through the rain.

By St. Martin's Church he sat down, as if worn out, in a corner against the rails, and drew me to him, and kissed me, and tried to warm me in his arms. I was sobbing with the cold and with hunger; but he, though I had often of late known him cry over me, was soon quite still.

I thought he was asleep, and only moaned softly, lest I should awake him; but when the passing policeman, glancing into our nook, turned his lantern upon the wretched group, he saw that which spoke to his practised eye of no common case of want.

He called another and another, among them a stout man with grey hair and keen eyes under bushy eyebrows; and they drew my father from me, and raised him up, and someone carried me, and said, to quiet me, that I should be taken with him; but how we went I cannot tell.

I suppose they wanted to hide my father's dead face from me. They took me to what I now know was a workhouse; but everyone was kind, and I was warmed and fed; and then I cried to go to my father, for he was all I had.

They took me in to see him—dead; so handsome and stately he looked, as I had never seen him in life.

Some one—the doctor, I think—had pinned upon his breast a bit of crimson ribbon taken from one of the pockets. That was all they found about him, save a letter, written and directed, but not sent, for—ill and starved and broken down—where could he get even the stamp? They fetched a thick red book—an "Army List" I have been told it was—and looked in it, and spoke of my father, and called him Major Folliott. And one—the doctor it was again, I think—stood at the foot of the bed and told a well-known story of the Crimean War, then still fresh in all men's thoughts; and when he had done, and it moved them—maybe the policeman was an old Army man, for he looked very sternly at his helmet—he pointed to the still calm face lying there before us: "That was the man."

I was eleven years old when my cousin, John Penton, transplanted my little white face and shy brown eyes to the farmhouse where my mother had once lived. Gathering from the letter I spoke of above that my father was about to ask him for help—for me, not for himself—the people in London sent to him; and he took charge of me with a readiness which was quickened, though then I did know it, by anger against my father's kinsfolk. The Derbyshire farmer was determined not to be outdone in generosity by the Cheshire squire, who had thought an alliance with his family a crime to be punished in the person of the offender by a lifelong disgrace. And so John Penton took me to Scarfside. How shall I fitly tell of the home that became mine, and which I pray Heaven may be home to me to the end of the chapter?

Try to see a valley as narrow as valley can be, so that at each end there is hardly room for a cart to pass in or out; a valley, too, so steep that the brook, full or low, is always in a hurry to get through it. On one side, like a green wall with a grey rock here and there jutting out, rises the Razor's Edge, the summit of which is as narrow as its name would show.

Scarfside, on the other side of the valley, so near, that as you poise yourself on the top of Razor's Edge, taking care not to fall backwards into Kirtledale, you fancy you could throw a stone over it.

Scarfside—the hill, not the house—is less hard to climb, and has a nice spacious cone on which to rest when you get to the top.

The long, low, grey house, with its stone chimneys and deep-set windows, has a large porch to protect one from the wind, which in winter sweeps by so keenly. The narrow garden running down the brookside, and the orchard with its old stunted fruit trees and its stone-gate pillars—they are far too imposing to be styled posts—fill up all the rest of the tiny glen.

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Over the doorway a coat-of-arms is carved in stone; for Scarfside—now only a farmstead, and a small one—was a gentleman's house when Prince Charlie was over the water, and the Pentons, though but a few acres of barren-hill-side are left, and they have sunk to the level of the farmers around, have as much right to call themselves *armigeri* as the wealthiest baronet in the county.

Something, it may be, of bygone culture has descended to the present owner; and in all outward things, save his courtesy, a rough, Derbyshire Yeoman, John Penton, mixing little with his neighbours, has spent much of his time over books, and tended very carefully the seed sown when he was a boy at Derby School. So he was able to teach me by the cosy kitchen fire many things which a score or less of years ago girls were not wont to be taught. True, of French, German, and music I got none; but of Latin, English, and history I got much; and I well remember John Penton one spring evening taking me to the old London-road two miles away over the hills, and telling me how Prince Charles, the young Pretender, passed that way to Derby in '45. Many and many a time afterwards, when I had given Marjory the slip, I used to go to the same place and sit and dream of the bonnie Prince marching by.

We were an odd group round the deep fireplace in winter. John, in his rough clothes, yellow gaiters, and heavy boots, at the little round table at one side, reading to me Macaulay's history, or hearing me some grammar. Marjory, the kindest of old women, who had nursed my mother, would be on the settle at the other side, her rheumatic back well protected from the draught; and David Boag, my cousin's shadow, as once in a pet I called him, so closely did he always attend his master, would be in the chimney-corner, his legs in the firelight, but his face in the shade, sleeping perhaps, though often his piercing eyes would seem to glint through the shadow as they caught mine, giving me an eerie feeling.

He was such a favourite, however, with my cousin, that I could not but like him. They were all good to me, and those were six pleasant, healthy, quiet years, the first that I spent at Scarfside.

I was always glad to be with John, sometimes learning from him, sometimes teasing him, and I was never so happy as when I could ramble after him when he went about his work. But there came a time when he grew silent; the lessons almost ceased, and he seemed to avoid me, and was often cross with us. He went out earlier and he came home later than of old, and even Boag's attendance seemed to give him no pleasure. I asked Marjory if I had offended him, but she only kissed me and said it was the master's way. It was a way which I think must have been catching; for I too grew shy when we were together, though I was angry with myself, and did not know why; my teasing ways had taken flight, and if he scolded me I felt as if I could cry, though when a child I had laughed at him in his sternest mood. And so when I would be out for a solitary walk, it began to come home to me that I had been living so long upon his kindness, and that it was time I did something for myself.

So one morning, after breakfast, I spoke to him in the parlour, which we always kept for serious business, and told him that I wished to obtain a situation. He asked me, looking gravely through the window as he spoke, if I were tired of Scarfside and its middle-aged people; and, if I had not been so angry with him for saying such a thing, I should have cried bitterly.

As it was, I told him how dear it would always be to me, and that I had not forgotten the cruel streets of London from which he had taken me. Whereupon he said something of thirty-two years and his roughness, to which, as being untrue and having nothing to do with the matter, I said nothing; and he asked me to be his wife.

Then I did cry; but it was with joy, not anger. I was seventeen then, and he was thirty-two, then and now and ever to me all that is strong and brave and good. I was not afraid to tell him yes, for my shyness

Turned his lantern upon the wretched group.

seemed to have fled. I was only proud and glad, for I knew that I loved him well.

And John kissed my tears away, and took me to Marjory, and told her; and so John and I found out our love, and the old wainscotted parlour is dear to us both even now.

* * * * *

I have heard that there are few women so happy as to be loved by two men; it fell out so with me, yet it brought anything but happiness. I don't know when it was that I began to see that David Boag was always at my heels as he used to be at John's, but it was long before my cousin made me happy by a few words in the business parlour.

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I do not think any one else saw David's change of manner, but I did, or thought I did, and it made me ill at ease with him. Therefore, when John told him that we were to be married, I was glad to see him not cast down, but kindly to me; and if he was more noisy than usual, being as a rule a silent man, yet it was brave of him to hide his vexation by a little gaiety, and good-natured of him not to damp our joy.

He asked me to be his wife.

* * * * *

At times life is like a full stream. Scarcely had I become sure that Scarfside would always be my home, when a fresh event came upon us from that outside world which seemed so small by the side of the little glen that held all I loved. It was the death of my grandfather, old Mr. Folliott.

I have said nothing of his dealings with my father, for I do not wish to write any evil; and indeed I am bound not to do so of him. He was sorry at the last, and would have undone the wrong. That he could not do, for my poor father had been lying seven years in Kirtledale churchyard, whither John Penton had brought him.

But the old man did something. He made a fresh will, which caused so many telegrams and letters to come to us, to say nothing of keen old gentlemen in carriages from Derby, and even further, that many people round who had never heard of Scarfside before must have learnt the way to it; and I suppose that was why neighbours whom we had scarcely seen of late found us out by this time.

Of course I was pleased to find that I should bring something to John, but I was vexed that he should have to go away about my business, as the lawyers would have him do.

This was the first time that John had been away since I grew up, and I felt very wretched without him on the day he went. I was soon myself again, however; the day, though cold, was bright, and I was soon cheery enough, and quite ready to help Marjory in the dairy. We had plenty to do that day and the next; and on the third, just when I felt that Marjory was very cross and David very stupid, a letter came from John saying he should return by the last train that night, but would not reach Scarfside until between one and two in the morning; and he added that we were not to sit up for him. We were all a little excited by his return, so quiet was our life, and I am sure David was as fidgety as I was myself.

Twice that day we were disturbed: first a tramp called. Now, we were always very good to beggars, partly because those who live in quiet places are so, and partly because I sometimes thought of a little waif who crouched in the cold and wet on the steps of St. Martin's Church. But this was a man of undeserving temper, for he was wicked enough to kick Kelpie the sheep-dog—she was very old and weak now, and had crept out to enjoy a little of the winter sunshine on the stones before the porch—and foolish enough to think that no one saw him. Be sure Marjory and I rated him soundly, and gave him nothing, but told him that when David came in from his work he should come after him with the cart-whip. We told David, and for a look from me he would have done it gladly, though the man must have gone some way by that time. But I did not look.

Then, earlier in the day, we had a more unusual visitor; a lady, or one who seemed so—for she was closely veiled, as if against the cold—walked up to the door and asked to see Mr. Penton. We were very curious about her, for she would not rest or take anything; but when she heard that he was from home, walked quickly back by the way she came.

The night was cold and very dark. That made me fearful, and perhaps set us talking of every mischance that could befall John. When bedtime came, after making up a good fire and setting out the master's supper, which I did with my own hands, we yet sat lingering on in the kitchen, and I was nearly selfish enough to ask David to go and meet him. But I had heard David say that he was tired, and I was loth to ask a favour of him, or to seem foolish.

At length, we went up to bed. Until John came home

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there would be no sleep for me and I did not try to get any, but, partly undressed, and wrapping a blanket round me, sat at the window, looking out into the darkness and praying for him. I knew I should hear his wheels the moment he had passed the entrance to the valley, and my ears were on the stretch to catch the first sound.

Then I began to think that he already ought to be here, that he was later than he should be, that something had happened, and I stole downstairs to look at the kitchen clock. But it was not so; and no sooner had I satisfied myself than David, whom I thought asleep, hurried down also, aroused by the little noise I had made.

Hardly had I got back to my post when the rattle of wheels on the hard road gladdened my ears. He was coming—my John was coming; no one else ever drove down the hill at that pace.

Soon I could catch the jingling of the harness in the frosty air; nearer and nearer they were coming, hardly slackening at all, and I could hear the horse's footfall as well coming swiftly down the well-known road. How dark it was, I was trying, but peer as I would, I could not make out his figure as he drove into the orchard, when—Ah—a loud crash that sounded dully through the stillness, a rattling fall in which splintering wood and kicking heels seemed mingled; the oncoming wheels stopped, everything stopped, silence, silence.

I was in the act of fastening my dress but after one choking sob, while my heart stood still, I fled down the stairs, and with trembling hands unlocked the door before Marjory and David, who had both been awakened by my cries, could help.

How quickly I sped across the garden and through the orchard to the gateway.

Thank Heaven, John himself, and unhurt clasps me in his arms, and kisses me with shaking lips.

I cared for nothing more.

They brought lights soon, and a gun to put the poor horse out of his pain; he was beyond help. Then the master and all of us came into the kitchen, and there was that in his face I had never seen before. We listened, and I clung to him as he spoke.

It was no accident. Someone had placed a ladder taken from the ricks across the gate-pillars (there never was a gate there in our time), and leaning against them so that it must throw down the horse, looking for no obstacle.

Steep as the road was he must have meant murder. The shafts were snapped like matches, and the dog-cart thrown on to the poor horse's back; but by what we call chance his driver was flung sideways on to the turf, and escaped with a shaking.

We gazed into one another's faces, and found the whiteness of our own reflected there.

Who had done this cruel, this dastardly thing, and why? Had John laid his hand upon him at that moment small mercy would have been his; and even Marjory would have made him tremble, the old woman's anger was so deep. For me, John was safe!

The peaceful life that we had led at Scarfside seemed to have come to an end. In truth, we had now much to think of and much to do; and the attempt upon my cousin's life—base as it was, having, so far as we knew, no link with the future—filled less and less of our thoughts. I, indeed, was afraid to let my mind run upon it, my anger grew so hot within me.

It was all put down to the tramp; and if suspicion fell elsewhere, we did not hear of it. They scoured the countryside for him as far as Derby; but he must have made haste to put the miles between himself and us, for they did not come up with him. We were all mistaken as you will see.

When our excitement had somewhat died away, John had great news for us. My grandfather had left all he had to leave to me; and though the acres that once stretched on every side of the still stately old mansion were sadly diminished by long bygone extravagances, enough remained to give a fair rent-roll, and the lawyers held out hopes that, by prudence, the waning fortunes of the house might in time be augmented.

John had to tell us that I was quite a rich young lady.

I stole downstairs to look at the kitchen clock.

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There was a woman with him; tall and young and handsome.

We could hardly believe it. Even now I was to have an allowance that to us seemed wonderful; and as he told us of all these things, I am not ashamed to avow that my heart beat faster—but it was for his sake. How old Marjory cried with delight as she called me an heiress, and stroked my locks as if they had turned to real gold! David's fingers worked faster than ever with pleasure; and only John seemed almost sad as he painted my possessions in the richest colours. Perhaps it was because the lawyers thought fit that I should live at Folliott Park for a short time before our marriage. They had arranged that I should go there in a month or so, when some nice old lady had been found to take care of me, until my cousin should have the best of all rights to do so. Such matters gave us a great deal to do. Still, I had time to notice that John, whose every look I knew so well, was troubled by a letter which came to him about this time. He did not show it to me as was his way. I would not vex him with questions; but I was sure that day he was fidgeting about something, and he made so little of me, that I was very low when bedtime came. It was very foolish to be troubled by John's abstraction; but I was. And it seemed as if David saw it and wished me not to think of it; for in the afternoon of the next day he came and told me that the otter was in the little pool just below the orchard.

A week before, one took up his abode thereabouts; and as I had never seen an otter, John and he had promised to fetch me, when there was any chance of catching sight of it out of its holt.

I was not at that moment in spirits to enjoy the chance to the full; but David had so set his heart upon my going, and was so eager that I should not miss it, that I did not like to disappoint him after he had taken the trouble to fetch me. I ran out with him without my hat through the garden, and down to the brook; and we had just reached the end of the orchard above the pool, when we saw John—or rather I did; for David was intent upon the otter.

John was not alone—how quickly I saw that. And as I looked, the dull feeling of trouble that had been hanging over me for a day or two, caused by his coldness, or perhaps only a shadow of what was coming, took solid shape. There was a woman with him: tall and young and handsome. The one, in all certainty, who called upon us while he was away.

But now her veil was back and she was gazing into his face, and he was holding both her hands tightly and leaning over her as he talked slowly and earnestly, just as he and I had often talked. Oh, John, John! I had seen enough for my pride. They were in the road just at the entrance of the valley, out of earshot from the orchard, and where no one could see them from the house. I had no eyes for the otter now; only for him and her. As well as I could I made some excuse.

Happily, David was too eager in his quest to notice them, and I made him come back with me to the house. Then I crept up to my room and cried so bitterly. You see, I had believed in John, and pinned my girlish faith on him; and I feared that my idol was of clay. Who was this woman whom he had met outside the house and whose hands he clasped as I had known him clasp mine, and in whose face he gazed so earnestly?

I was sure she was handsome; and I had seen her eyes sparkle from where I stood. But I was too proud to tell him I had seen them. He should not think he was watched.

When we met at tea, however, my manner was not as usual; and he soon felt that there was something wrong between us. Oddly too, this evening John was more like his old self; he had got rid of his thoughtfulness, and rallied me quite merrily on my sweet bow of ribbon.

Then he asked me soberly if I were well; and though I did not seem to be looking at him, I knew that he was puzzled and anxious. From this his face changed to gravity, which, as the evening wore on, took more and more a look of pain and thought.

I would have given the world to have taken his dear head on my shoulder, and kissed away the cares from his brow, and the aching from his eyes; but that woman was between us, and the wound was too fresh.

Those were four wretched weeks that followed my unlucky visit to the otter's pool. John gave me no explanation, nor did he hint at his secret meeting; but his manner grew colder and colder, and his voice more hard when he spoke to me, so that even David saw that something was amiss, and, in his good-natured way, I suppose, thought that by being more gay himself he might conceal, if he could not mend, the breach between us.

David's merriment, well meant though it might be, jarred upon us. As for Marjory, I knew not why, she was sometimes vexed with me; and then again, I would catch her looking at me in a pitying way, that told she guessed what was the matter. But she said nothing. Dear Marjory, I have learnt how ill she was thinking of her bairn, and how love was struggling with anger in her honest breast.

So the breach grew wider day by day; and by the end of the month, without a word said, John and I had tacitly made up our minds that all was over between us.

On the evening before I was to leave for Chester—that part of the plan was still adhered to—we did have something in the shape of an explanation. He asked me to

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go for a walk with him; and we climbed Scarfside together, as we had so often done before. It was a silent walk.

We both wished to say something; and it did not get itself said, until we were at the orchard gate on the way home again. Then he did speak, in his brave way, very shortly, and how much to the point I hardly felt, until I got to my room, and hid my face on the dear little bed that had known all my childish joys and sorrows.

Circumstances (it was unlike him to be lenient to himself, I thought), he said, had come between us; and we must not blame one another in the time to come.

However, we were more cheerful that last evening; it may be because we had, to some extent, found out our footing, and there was no fear of our warmth being mistaken.

Our talk was chiefly of my journey next day. I was not sorry when John was called away on some outdoor business upon the farm, which would detain him until after our bed-time, and I was able to go to my room under pretence of finishing my packing, but really to sit down and think sadly to myself that this was my last night in the old home which had taken me in when I was homeless and friendless. In the old days how good cousin John had been to me, how generously he had sheltered me when I was a helpless child in whom he could see only something to pity. Afterwards he had seen something to love; he had loved me once—I clung to that; and then—a bitter then it was that followed.

But thinking of these things, a resolve grew strong within me that, before I left, I would tell him I freely wished him happiness, and that, forgetting the later past, I should ever be grateful for the kindness of my childish days. His last thought of me should not be that I went away full of resentment.

The household had all gone to bed. It was close upon midnight, and still he had not come in, for I should have heard him come up the stairs. What time could be better than the present, late as it was? I should sleep more contentedly, if not more happily, when I had got rid of some of this weight of gratitude. A month ago, and I should have thought him little satisfied with gratitude alone.

The last time that I had waited thus—and yet not thus, alas!—for him had been on the evening of his accident, if it might be called so, at the orchard gate. The stillness of the house and the hour made me think of it with an uneasy shudder; but now there could be no danger—he had only gone to an outlying shed to see one of the cattle which was ill; David Boag should have done it, but he was unwell and had gone early to bed.

At first I was only impatient for John to come in that I might see him, and say what I meant to say; but as the time wore on, and got later, and the house more and more still, and yet he did not come, I grew uneasy about him. Not for long; he must have let himself in very quietly, for, though I did not hear the door opened, he is moving softly in the kitchen underneath. Without taking a light I go quietly down the stairs, cross the little hall, and pause an instant in the darkness at the half-open door, fearful at the last lest John may think it unmaidenly of me.

The door between the hall and kitchen is half open, and with my hand already stretched out to push it farther I am stopped by what I see within. Surely this is not the familiar room where the kettle has so often sung, and the long oaken table mirrored our laughing faces. John is not there, but someone is—someone—a dark, dark form crouching on the hearth in the full blaze of the fire, and at the sight of his waiting figure and the thing in his hands, my heart stands still, as it did once before at my bedroom window. That ill-omened watcher so patiently waiting, weapon in hand, means danger to someone—to John.

The hearth is on my left hand as I look in through the door, which faces the outer one leading from the kitchen into the open air. There is no light in the room save that of the wood fire, which is burning brightly, filling the room with lights and shadows; and though I cannot see the man's face, which is turned away, watching the outer door opposite me and beyond him, the door by which John may come in at any moment, yet what he holds so tenderly is plain enough. It is John's gun. He is waiting there, in the quiet kitchen, with only the loud ticking of the clock to keep pace with my heart, to murder him when he comes in through that door.

What am I to do? If I leave my post for an instant, before I can get to one of the windows upstairs to warn him, John may come in, and it will be too late. What!

That ill-omened watcher, weapon in hand, means danger to someone—to John.

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Of all others, the man is David Boag the bailiff! He has turned his head, as if he heard the beating of my heart, and it is he indeed.

It is his, David's face, and yet it is not.

The features are distorted with fiendish glee; the eyes are glittering with the glitter of madness, and the teeth, from which the lips are drawn back, are clenched in the fixity of his purpose. He is watching that door with the tenacity of a dog, never winking.

Even as he turns his head to listen his eyes do not quit the door before him, and he clutches the gun with hands that are firm with the strength of madness. Mad he is, and in a madman's most dangerous mood. A new thought breaks in upon my mind.

As I think of a hundred little things, I wonder I have never suspected this before. How shall I save John?

So gravely and tenderly he told it me.

Of myself I did not think, thank Heaven, as I leant against the wall, hardly four yards from this armed maniac, but only how I might save my lover.

For the moment he was my lover again, and the last weeks of estrangement were forgotten. Not a sound in the house but the clock ticking on, and the hushed fall of the wood ashes.

Marjory and the servant were fast asleep at the end of a long passage upstairs, little thinking of the scene that the firelight was shining upon.

I dared not stir; John might open that door at any moment, and I felt no hope that that dark vengeful form, crouching in that shadowy room, would miss his aim, though the fire flickered, and sometimes to my fancy seemed to multiply him, and fill all the room with lurking figures, ready to pounce upon me. No plan occurred to me; and even as I thought, the key turned slowly and gratingly in the lock of the outer door, at which I gazed desperately.

It shook; John's fingers were on the latch lifting it; and with every nerve strained, with a face like a stone, the madman was bringing the gun to his shoulder. This was no time for thought now.

As quick as thought itself, and almost as still, I glided in behind him into the room, and as he raised the weapon, and the door was opened widely, I sprang forward and flung my arms round the madman, striking up the gun.

Even so it was Heaven's mercy, not I, that saved my lover. Had he not lingered a moment to scrape his boots I had been too late; as it was the charge struck the wall just above the door. As David dashed me, screaming loudly now, on the floor, John, who seemed to take it all in in an instant, had his hands upon him and tried to throw him.

It was a grim struggle by the flickering blaze of the fire, while I lay only able to scream; not that David in his saner moments was any match for his master in strength, but to-night the force of madness was in him. Again and again he tried to dash John against the fireplace or the table, and seemed getting the better of him, while the half-uttered cries that forced themselves from his writhing foaming lips told of the fierce hate that nerved his mad fingers in their clutches at his master's throat.

And I could do nothing, or only scream. But fortunately my cries and the gun-shot brought down Marjory; and the stout old woman gave such aid, that soon the poor wretch was lying fast and bound on the floor.

Then they turned to me with such pitying words. It had not hurt me as I fell, but somehow my arm was broken. I would have had it broken a dozen times to save John's life.

Then they lifted me up and I fainted away.

* * * * *

The doctor had gone and left me quite comfortable; Marjory was sitting by the fire making up for the loss of her night's rest, and I could hear John moving downstairs.

It was just the time in the afternoon when a farmhouse is always so still, and as I watched Marjory's cap nodding, my thoughts, which had been nervously dwelling on the details of the past night, conjuring up poor David's distorted face, or the ill-omened figure crouching in the gloom of the fire-lit kitchen, began to turn to myself. I had saved my cousin's life—my cousin's; he could be nothing more to me, the night had altered that. I struggled to make my thankfulness for his safety pure from all regret that the life so saved was to be given to another. Still, I could now more easily say the words I had been on my way to say to him last night, and they would be more needed, for he could not but be sorry that his love had gone from me.

So I was thinking when John came upstairs, and told me what the doctor said of the "little girl's" courage; so gravely and tenderly he told it me, almost wistfully I thought. Perhaps he was thinking of what might have been. Then he went on to speak of poor David Boag, and I listened, getting more and more interested.

Twenty years ago John's grandfather, the owner of Scarfside Farm, had been hard pressed for money. Scarfside was fast slipping from the hands of the old family, when a friend, himself not too well off, a man who had long lived side by side with him, came to his aid, and the land was saved.

Old Penton did not forget the debt, nor did he think it fulfilled when the money was repaid. Hugh Boag died before his friend, and when he was near his end, he sent for him in great distress, and confided to him his two infant grandchildren and the little he had to

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leave them. Penton held it as a sacred trust, and as such, handed it on to his grandson with the old place.

But the trust was a heavy one: there was the taint of madness on the mother's side, which, in the case of the elder child, a girl, soon showed itself; and no sooner had she grown up than it was found necessary to confine her where she could be taken good care of.

"I never felt much fear for David," John went on, "though I knew that he was not quite like other men. He was so good a man of business, and so thoroughly acquainted with his work, that I came to feel secure. Here there was little to excite him, and I had always been careful to keep him from all idea of the curse hanging over him, and to separate him from his sister, so that he was not even aware of her existence. Poor David! I fear he was the man who put the ladder against the orchard-gate; still, that is better than to think any sane man did it. Something of late must have excited him. I blame myself, Grace, that I did not notice the change in him some time ago, but I have been thinking of you—of your affairs—and have been troubled too about his sister. She escaped about a month ago from the people who take care of her, and found her way here. I did not speak of it because I thought it might alarm you; and, besides, we could hardly then have kept it from David. She hung about the place, and once wrote to me (there were times when she was fairly sane, and this was one), and made an appointment with me here. Luckily I contrived to meet her on the road, so that she did not come to the house. Poor thing! she is fierce and violent at times when the fit is upon her; but she was gentle enough then, and I persuaded her to go quietly with the people who were waiting close by with the carriage; they are very kind to her, I know, but I fear they will not undertake her brother. It was that and other things that made me less watchful of David."

John paused, but my head was buried in the pillow. Though my arm was bandaged up, the doctor had mercifully left me the power of turning on one side. How else should I have hid my burning face? There was not an inch of my skin that was not tingling with shame. How could I have doubted him, have wronged him, when he was trying only to save me from annoyance? How bad I must be to have built up this pile of jealousy, which had had no foundation, not even a weak one!

I could pretty well guess the cause of poor David's excitement, but I did not tell John then, though I have since.

Probably David, whether in malice or in mischief it would be hard to say, had deliberately led me to the otter's pool, that I might see John meeting the stranger, though his cunning taught him to hide his purpose even when it was accomplished.

A wild jealousy of John, only, I hope, in part on my account, had led him to plot against his master's life and love. How much of madness was in this from the beginning we can never be sure.

But while I was so ashamed of myself, I was also trembling with joy—doubting, hesitating joy—yet ready to start into glorious certainty at a word from John; for if this were not the cause of his coldness, what was? Was it merely the answer of his pride to my own manner? No matter, I could forgive him anything now that the nightmare that had brooded over my love was dispelled.

And so I hid my face in my pillow, and feeling as if my very hair were reddening, told John what I had been thinking these dreary weeks, and how I had blamed him in my jealous folly, and at last how I had been coming down last night, sadly but bravely, to wish him happiness. And then I asked him to forgive me: but he was so long in answering that in sudden dread I looked up to meet such an astonished face that I laughed through my blushes. I was very angry next moment, when he told me he had put down the change in my manner to my change in fortune; he had been thinking that of me on those long evenings when he was looking so sadly at the fire, and my love had almost melted my pride, I so longed to comfort him.

He and Marjory had thought this of me—that the girl whom they had sheltered when she was penniless and friendless would despise them when wealth had fallen to her. If I could have sat up I would have boxed his ears. I could do it now when I think of it. Oh, it was too bad. But as I could only cry a little (my smiles and tears were very near the surface that happy day), John had me in his power, and kissed me until I forgave him.

We resolved that nothing should ever make us distrust each other again; and now that nothing ever can. I thanked my broken arm a hundred times, but for which I might have missed my happiness; every pang it gave me told me that my lover was my very own.

When Marjory roused herself she found the fire almost out, and we remembered with a guilty start that the dear old lady with whom by this time I should have been far on the way to Chester, had passed the whole afternoon in the oak parlour. But though she was a grand personage, Mrs. Harcourt took to me at once. John was so polite to her; and I verily believe that she was delighted to stay quietly with us instead of undertaking my enthronement at Folliott Park. When we came to know her well she told me with a merry laugh that for all her dignified gravity she was frightened at her task, before she knew with whom she had to deal.

* * * * *

Yes, to-day, I, Grace Penton, am forty years old, and I am sitting in the dear old parlour where my husband first told me of his love; it seems but a month ago, so peaceful and happy have been the years that divide us from it. It is not often we can steal away here and be quiet. John is a great man in Cheshire, and but that he is one of the county members, he would have been High Sheriff this year. There, and in London most of our time has to be spent. Mrs. Harcourt and Marjory keep house at Scarfside, and sometimes, to their great pleasure we send the children to the old home when we cannot go ourselves.

On my right arm there is a small, hard lump where the bone was broken twelve years ago. I tell John often what a disfigurement it is when I am obliged to wear short sleeves, and if I had my way, I say, I should hide it with a bracelet. But he will not have it so; and, in secret, neither would I.

He says he is more proud of that little bruise than of the comeliness that makes men call me a belle at forty. We are rich and honoured and sought after, but I ever keep in memory the ragged child who crouched from the wind and rain in her dead father's arms in that dark corner by St. Martin's Church; and at times when the nights are coldest and darkest John takes me there—no matter for what. Surely it is debt I pay.

J. S.

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SHORT STORIES THAT MAKE YOU LAUGH.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, April 29th. Post-cards only, please. The prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. A. Kitchen, of 9 Chariot Street, Leeds, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

KNICKER: "You say your son is a contractor. What is his special line?"

Becker: "Debts."

JIMMY: "I say, ma, gimme a cake."

Mother (who is trying to teach him to be polite): "If you what, Jimmy?"

Jimmy: "Well, ma, if you've got any."

DOMESTIC: "Oh, please, mum, what shall I do? Half the soup is spilt, and the boarders is at the table."

Mrs. Slimdiet (firmly): "Empty the box of red pepper into what's left. There will be enough then."

VISITOR: "What! Haven't you named the baby yet?"

Mamma: "No."

Visitor: "Can't find anything good enough?"

Mamma: "N-no; can't find out which uncle is the richest."

NURSE GIRL: "I lost track of the child, mum, and——"

"Gracious goodness! Why didn't you speak to a policeman?"

Nurse Girl: "I was speaking to wan all the toime, mum."

"So you quarrelled with George?" said one young woman.

"Yes," answered the other with much pathos.

"Is your engagement broken off?"

"Oh, no. I told him I never wanted to see his face again, and he said he would leave me for ever. But we didn't go so far as to break off our engagement."

"YOU used to say you thought Heaven sent me to you," she said tearfully, after a little family jar.

"I see no reason to change my mind about that now," he returned.

"Really!" she exclaimed delightedly.

"Certainly," he replied.

Then he spoilt it all by adding:

"As a punishment."

"THIS is about the time of the year," said Mrs. Watts to her neighbour, "that the fishing fever strikes my husband. If he can get out on the banks of some creek and catch two or three little mud-cats in the course of an afternoon he is perfectly happy."

"Indeed? So he is fond of fishing, then?"

"Fond of fishing? Why, that man is a perfect anglomaniac."

"OUR baby seems to have a natural taste for the piano."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; he's sucked half the polish off one leg."

SOCIETY BEAUTY: "I declare, I was upon thorns the whole time."

The Hon. Toffleigh Smart: "And you were in your proper place, my dear."

Society Beauty: "What do you mean?"

The Hon. Toffleigh Smart: "Why, surely the proper place for a rose like yourself is upon a thorn."

"COULD you do somethin' fer a pore ole sailor?" asked the wanderer at the gate.

"Pore ole sailor?" echoed the lady at the tub.

"Yes'm. I follered the wotter fer twenty years."

"Well," said the lady at the tub, after a critical look, "you certainly don't look as if you ever ketched up with it."

MR. NEWLYWED (struggling to carve the first turkey his wife ever cooked): "I say, Mary, the bones in this bird are as brittle as flints. Just hear the knife grit."

Mrs. Newlywed (almost crying with anger): "You must be against the shells, John!"

"Shells?"

"Yes, John. Don't you remember that you asked me to stuff the turkey with oysters?"

*A CERTAIN Leeds firm a short time ago gave away as a bonus a pound packet of their celebrated tea on a purchase of 10s. One Saturday evening one of their assistants was suddenly taken ill, and was removed home in a cab. On inquiring the reason of this sudden collapse, it was stated that a lady walked into the shop and asked for 10s. of stamps. It took all there was in the store, but the assistant wished to please the lady. She took the stamps and handed over the 10s., thanked him, and waited.

"Is there something else, madam?" queried the assistant.

"Oh! no," replied the lady. "There is nothing I wish to buy."

And still she waited.

"You gave me the correct amount for the stamps, did you not, madam?" asked the assistant.

"Yes," replied the lady.

"Are you sure there is nothing else you are wanting?"

"Well, I noticed you were giving a pound of tea on a purchase of 10s., and I am waiting for my tea."

The assistant is slowly recovering.

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I've an utter contempt for riches, mind;
For banknotes, and bonds, and deeds,
But, alas! my contempt is not the kind
Familiarity breeds.

Lady: "Most of your trouble, I suppose, is due to drink?"

Tramp: "Well, yes, lady; it is a good deal of trouble to get a drink sometimes."

Badger (angry and excited): "I say, your dog bit one of my boys last night. What are you going to do about it?"

M'Gall: "Well, if it doesn't make the dog ill, I won't do anything about it."

One day the children were having an object lesson on the heron. The master called attention to its small tail, saying, "The bird has no tail to speak of."

The next day he asked the scholars to write a description of the bird, and one youngster wound up by saying: "The heron has a tail, but it must not be talked about."

"Your eyes are like diamonds," he said, and she smiled.
As a thought on her suddenly dawned.
For she knew that he might be in hard straits some day;
She replied, "But they cannot be pawned!"

Fair Visitor: "So you have really decided not to sell your house?"

Fair Hostess: "Yes. You see, we placed the matter in the hands of a real estate agent. After reading his lovely advertisement of our property, neither John nor myself could think of parting with such a wonderful and perfect home."

Recently a newspaper man received a railway free pass, and wrote to the superintendent asking him if he could not embrace his wife also on the trip. The superintendent replied that he thought perhaps he could, but did not want to say positively until he had seen the wife, as he was a little fastidious in his tastes.

A friend called at a young would-be artist's studio a few days ago and found the budding R.A. putting the finishing touches to a picture.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked the artist, stepping backward to get a good view of his work.

His friend stared at the picture in astonishment, for it depicted a man falling headfirst from an immensely high cliff, at the bottom of which a mass of jagged rocks awaited him. But the falling man's face wore an expression of rapturous enjoyment!

"Suicide or lunatic?" queried the artist visitor.

"Neither. Realism, my boy, simply realism!" cried the budding Millais enthusiastically. "You see," he explained, "I read in Pearson's Weekly a week or two ago that a person, while falling from a great height, hears beautiful music, suffers no pain, terror, or despair, and altogether experiences most agreeable sensations. We must be realistic these days, my boy."

New Boarder: "Can I get my meals on time?"
Landlady: "No, you will have to pay in advance."

A devoted wife calls her husband "My Uncrowned King."

Bald-headed probably.

"Well," said the good-natured man, as he sat in the restaurant, "that is a most accommodating waiter. He probably thinks I am not hungry, and is waiting for me to get an appetite."

"I can tell your fortune and find out your future husband for you, lady," said a gipsy.

"If you find him out as often as I find my present husband out," replied the lady, "I shall never marry again."

Jackson: "I've been married for fifteen years, and my wife never fails to meet me at the door."

Johnson: "Wonderful!"

Jackson: "Yes, she's afraid I might go in without wiping my boots."

Magistrate: "The assault you have committed on your poor wife is a most brutal one. Do you know of any reason why I should not send you to prison?"

Prisoner: "If you do, yer worship, it will spoil our honeymoon."

He (who has just been rejected): "You don't dare to say 'No' again."

She: "Why not?"

He: "Because two negatives make an affirmative."

She: "Not with a woman."

He: "How many does it take with a woman?"

She: "One."

An old whitewasher stood before the court as a witness.

The lawyer for the defendant tried to confuse him. "You are James Miller?"

"Yes."

"Are you the James Miller who was sentenced under mitigating circumstances for robbery?"

"No."

"You are, perhaps, the Miller who was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for theft, then?"

"I am not that Miller either."

"Were you ever in prison?"

"Yes, twice."

"How long the first time?"

"One afternoon."

"One afternoon! And the second time? You must make a truthful statement, for you are a sworn witness. If you were in prison for so short a time, what did you do?"

"I whitewashed a cell for a lawyer who had cheated his clients."

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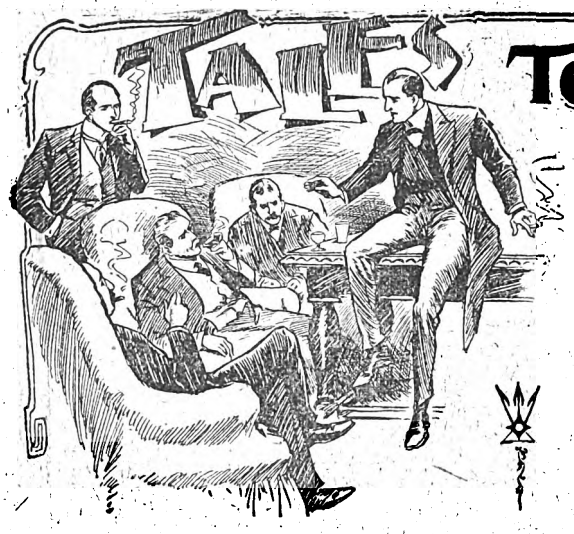

Told "off Duty."

[You probably don't know the "Stand-Easy" Club. It isn't in the directory, and you might live next door to the place for years without knowing of its existence by that name. It isn't a conventional club; there is no subscription, and there is no register of members. It is merely a room in a quiet, orderly, and select hostelry in Westminster, where, by common consent, a number of officials of all kinds meet when "off duty." There you may find detectives from Scotland Yard, near by; firemen, commissionaires, a soldier or two, and maybe a doctor from St. Thomas' Hospital or elsewhere. A motley crowd they would be if they wore their uniforms, but at the "Stand-Easy" uniforms are a rarity, "mufti" being the unwritten rule. The result is a gathering of quiet, well-behaved, and well-dressed men. Saturday night is the time when one sees the biggest muster, for then it is the custom for one member to regale the company with a story, the story being, as a rule, an account of some incident in the teller's own career.]

A Fight to the Death.

THE FENCING MASTER'S STORY.

If a man is lucky enough to make a bit of a name for himself in any particular line during his career in the Army, he generally finds that he can turn his experience to very good account when he has bidden good-bye to the service.

A riding-master, if he has contrived to put by a little nest-egg, as many of them do, will open a riding school and probably do well at it. His old officers stand by him, you see, send their own sons to him and get other people to do the same, so that he goes into the business with a nice little following at his heels.

In my own particular case, I had made a reputation with the sword, which stood by me well in after days. I was champion of the regiment up to the day I left it. And, though I say it myself, there were few going in those days who could hold their own against me either with the broadsword or foils. I could show you at home a sideboard covered with silver cups, medals, and other trophies, all of which I scooped in at different tournaments and assaults-at-arms.

When I got my discharge, then, the first thing I did was to start a School of Arms on my own account, or rather I took over a shaky concern, which was pretty well on its last legs, and tried to put new life into it. And though there have been ups and downs in the business, as in most others, on the whole I have no great cause to grumble.

The outside public know very little of these establishments, although there are several of them sprinkled over London. They are frequented mostly by men of a certain class—celebrities, many of them—who seem to have inherited the love of sword-play from their ancestors of the good old fighting days. Actors, too, turn up there to learn tricks of fence, which they can show off behind the footlights, and of course, we have a fair number of military men.

Sometimes, but not often, a stranger may drop in. As a general rule when you put a weapon into their hands they are quite out of their element, but once in a way you may drop across a man who knows just as much about it as you do yourself—and, perhaps, a bit more into the bargain. As, for instance, in the case of the singular person who was known to us as The Count.

Whether he was a real live Count or not, I'm sure I can't say, nor even now have I the least idea as to his name. But we got into the habit of alluding to him by this title at my place, for he was a man of the most polished and distinguished manners—a gentleman down to his finger-tips.

When he first turned up at the School of Arms I gave him a turn with the foils myself. It didn't take many seconds, after we had crossed blades, to assure me that I was face to face with a man who could give me points even in my palmiest days. He had a wrist of steel, a quick, sure eye, and was a perfect master of fence into the bargain.

I tried him with the broadsword—my favourite weapon—and I don't mind admitting that he fairly knocked spots off me. Then, out of sheer curiosity, I placed a revolver in his hands.

The Count took it with a smile. Sticking up a card against the wall—the five of clubs—he stepped back twelve paces and commenced to fire. When he had finished, there were five round holes where the clubs had been!

After that he came in regularly almost every morning, and practised with each weapon in turn. When he was shooting I often stood by and watched him with the most curious sensation of awe and wonder. He set about it with such deadly earnestness one would almost have supposed that a mortal enemy of his stood before him in place of the target. I couldn't help thinking that there was some deep motive underlying all this, that he was keeping his hand in for some definite and special purpose, known only to himself.

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And that purpose, by a singular chance, I was soon destined to learn.

Not long afterwards the Count disappeared from the School of Arms as suddenly as he had turned up there. I missed him very much at first, especially as his fame had got round and numbers used to drop in to see him fence. He was a splendid advertisement for me; one of the best "draws" I ever had.

As business was rather slack just then I made up my mind to run across to Paris in order to witness the grand assault-at-arms which was to take place there, and in which some of the most famous French and Italian fencing-masters were to compete. It was, in fact, a trial of skill between the two countries, a test as to which particular style could be called the better; to me a sight well worth seeing.

On the French side the man who held the leading place was a certain Captain Movart. He had been a noted duellist in his day—and still was, for that matter, provided he could get anyone to fight with him. His deadly reputation, however, caused people to give him a wide berth. Unless he could purposely provoke a quarrel, which, it is said, he sometimes did in order to keep his hand in, few men could be found to face him.

His career in the army had been a notorious one. It was commonly reported that he could boast of eleven victims, most of them young officers whom his bitter taunts had forced into fight. I believe he was heard to say that when he had brought his total up to a round dozen he would throw up duelling altogether; but so far no one cared to oblige him by becoming number twelve.

Yet, bully and blackleg as he was, there was no denying that he was unsurpassed with the rapier, which was the weapon he loved most. His play was superb. I saw him myself on this occasion defeat one of Italy's most famous champions, and it was a sight I am not likely to forget.

There was a café close by which was much frequented by the fencers and others who were devoted to the art. Movart was generally to be found there of an evening. He always sat apart, at a little special table of his own. No one ever dared to take possesion of that table, even when he was not present. By common consent it was always reserved for him.

One evening I happened to stroll into the café close behind the captain himself. As he crossed the threshold I saw him pull up with a start, and glare around him as if he could scarcely believe his eyes.

I knew at the first glance that there was something in the wind. The waiter was quaking in his shoes, and all those present had an eager, expectant sort of look, as if they knew there was likely to be a breeze.

I glanced across towards that sacred table; and there, calmly reading a newspaper, the only perfectly self-possessed man in the room, sat my friend, the Count!

For the first second or so Movart seemed to be thunderstruck at the audacity of this stranger. Then, with a fierce scowl upon his face, he strode across the room.

"Do you know, sir," he blurted out, "that you are occupying my table?"

"Indeed!" returned the Count, looking up at him in the coolest manner possible, and without offering to stir. "I was not aware that you were proprietor of this café."

It was a neat thrust, and it struck home.

Movart's face grew black as a thundercloud, and in a quiver of rage he thrust out his hand as if to seize the other by the collar.

But the Count was too quick for him. In an instant he was upon his feet, and the next second I saw the Captain go staggering back, and fall with a crash to the floor.

My word, what a hubbub and a scene there was! Every man in the place sprang to his feet as if electrified. As for me, thinking the Count might be glad of someone to stand by him if there was to be a shindy, I hurried forward and took my place at his side. He seemed to divine my intention, and shot a grateful glance at me.

To describe Movart's look at that moment would be

I saw the Captain go staggering back and fall with a crash to the floor.

entirely beyond me. His eyes rolled in his head; every muscle of his face was twitching and working in a horrible manner. He clutched at his throat as if actually choking with rage, while his breath came in quick, hard pants.

It was some little time before he could control himself sufficiently to speak; and then he rose and advanced slowly towards his opponent.

"You shall pay for that blow with your life!" he hissed out.

The Count bowed.

"I am ready to afford you satisfaction at any moment," he said.

"With the rapier?" asked the captain, quickly.

"With any weapon you like."

"Good! My seconds shall call upon you forthwith. That is," he added with an ugly sneer, "if they know where you are to be found."

The Count took a card from his pocket and laid it quietly on the table.

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"They will find me at that address," he answered, "I have no doubt that this gentleman," he went on, turning to me, "will act on my behalf. He is one in whose hands I can safely place myself. Your seconds will find him at my rooms."

Movart picked up the card, turned on his heel, and strode out of the place. The Count ran his arm through mine, and we passed out through the gaping crowd.

"I must beg you to pardon this abrupt demand upon your services," he said, in his courteous way, when we got outside. "I can only plead in excuse that there are circumstances which make me very reluctant to apply to anyone here."

"If I am not mistaken, you have a score to wipe off with that man," I ventured to hint.

"I have," he returned, in his hardest tones. "The scene just now, as you may have guessed, was solely intended to bring about a meeting. Listen! As you are good enough to act for me in this affair it is only right that you should be made acquainted with the cause of the quarrel.

The counter-thrust was so swift that I hardly saw it reach its mark.

"Years ago, when I served in the army, I was stationed at a small town in the South of France. There I made the acquaintance of a beautiful girl, whose heart I won. And it was a heart of gold! We loved each other fondly, passionately. There was not a cloud to cast a shadow over our happiness.

"This Movart came; joined the regiment in which I was serving. He had an old grudge against me, and from the very first he set himself to thwart, to ruin me.

"He soon struck, in his venomous, serpent-like fashion. He accused me—Ah! *Mon Dieu*—he accused me of holding treasonable correspondence with a foreign power. You know what that means in France; you have had an instance of it lately in the case of the unfortunate Dreyfus.

"I was arrested, brought to trial; and, though I was acquitted, the stigma still rested upon my name. I found myself shunned, slighted on every hand.

"I sought out Louise—that was her name—who alone remained true to me. Her parents closed their doors against me. Movart had been there, poisoning their minds. The black-hearted villain even attempted to make love to the girl himself, though she turned from him with loathing, with detestation.

"I challenged him, of course. He declined to fight. His refusal, couched in the most offensive terms, was more cutting than any blow he could have dealt me with his sword. One word that letter contained will make his attitude clear to you; it was 'Traitor'!

"I left the army and went abroad. But I had no intention of allowing that heartless wretch to escape me. I have trained myself in the use of every weapon. You have seen me practise at your place in London. You now know for what purpose I came there."

"And Mademoiselle Louise?" I said, after a pause.

"Dead!" he answered. "Died of a broken heart."

I said nothing; somehow I felt too queer to speak. We walked on to his rooms in dead silence.

Scarcely had we arrived there than Movart's seconds made their appearance.

Everything was arranged that night, and early next morning we took the train from the city to the place of meeting.

Movart was already on the ground when we arrived. As he stared hard at the Count I saw him start, and a queer look seemed to come into his face. I think he recognised his old enemy then for the first time.

There was no delay in getting the men placed. Stripped to the waist, they stood toe to toe, each with a rapier in his hand.

How they fought those two men, those two deadly enemies! The rapiers darted and writhed like stinging serpents.

On any ordinary occasion they might have been very evenly matched; but as it was, the Count had a slight advantage, for he was a long way the cooler of the two.

Suddenly, as I watched them, Movart sprang back, and I saw a red strain spreading over his white shirt front. His second ran forward at once, but the captain waved him furiously aside:

"To the death!" he cried, springing to the attack again.

"To the death!" responded the Count, and they closed once more.

Movart made a vicious lunge, which the Count parried with his rare skill. The counter-thrust was so swift that I hardly saw it reach its mark; but when I looked there was the hilt of the rapier almost touching the captain's breast.

Even then he fought; fought like a wild cat! Not until his opponent had wrenched the weapon out and stepped back did he go to the ground.

Without even a glance at his fallen foe the Count turned away and walked across to me.

"You will permit me to thank you," he said, "for your services. I shall not forget your kindness."

And then as he glanced round toward the spot where Movart lay, the fire in his eyes seemed to die out suddenly, and gave place to a strange, sad kind of look.

"She is avenged!" he muttered, as if to himself.

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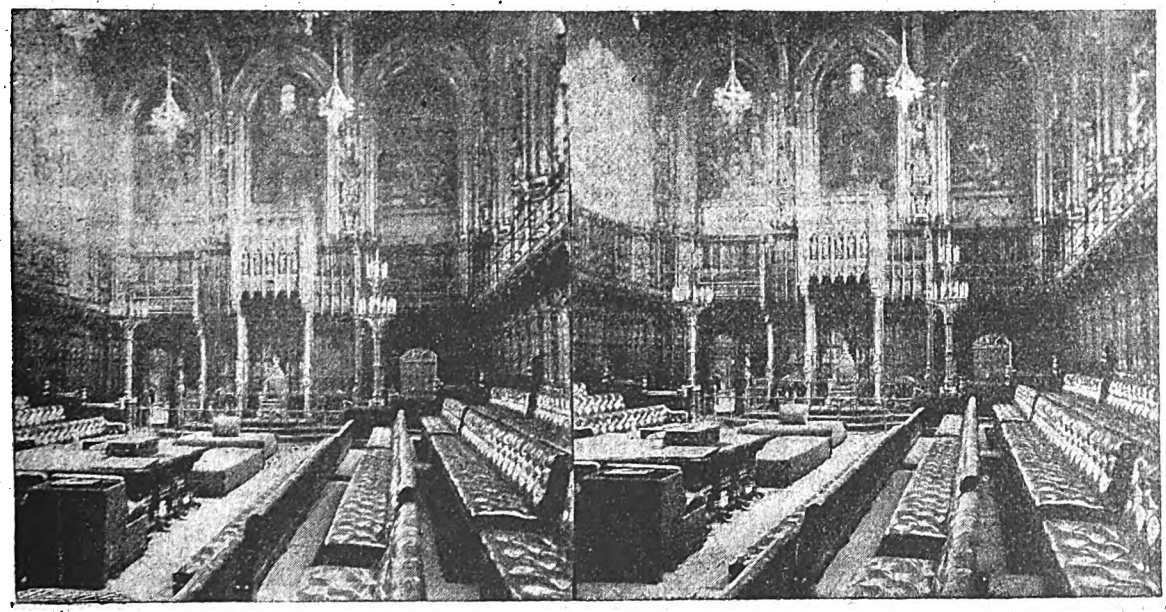
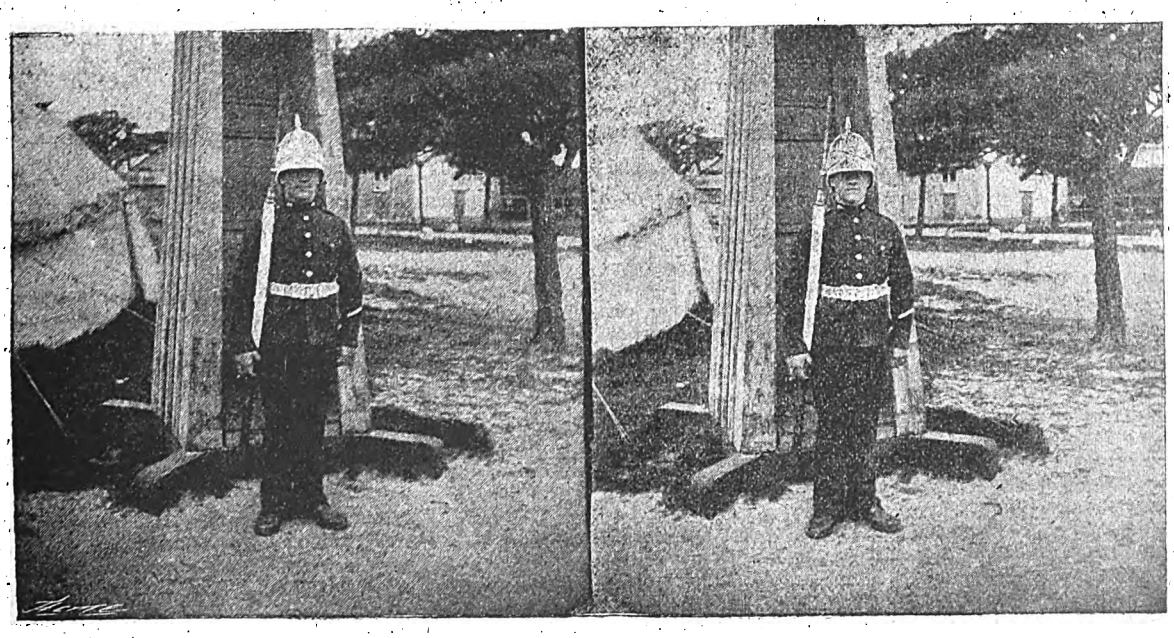
Our Stereoscopic Gallery.



Interior of the House of Lords.



"Sentry Go."

Readers will be pleased to hear that we are now giving away Stereoscopes in connection with our WEEKLY POSTCARD COMPETITION.—See page 526.

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MADGE FORSTER'S LOVE.

"SAVE me! Oh, do help me—they will kill me if they catch me!"

The girl was crouching in front of the kitchen fire, trying to fan the smouldering embers into a flame, when this cry for help reached her ears. She sprang to her feet and turned towards the door, clutching a stout piece of wood and standing erect in an attitude of defence.

She was alone in the farm-house. The farm hands and servants had fled from the district on the receipt of the news that Monmouth's rebel army was in the vicinity and that the King's troops under Faversham were approaching.

Her father had been obliged to leave her during the afternoon and had left with the promise that he would be back again in three hours, but it was now between eight and nine o'clock and he had not returned. Madge Forster had a stout heart, but the situation in which she was placed was disquieting.

In the twilight she found herself confronting a young man—a lad, rather—about her own age, which was just sixteen.

He was dressed in the garb of a peasant, but there was something in his demeanour that indicated higher birth. His face, too, contracted and pale with fear, was not that of a rustic.

"What do you want?" asked Madge, somewhat reassured to find that she had to deal with no more formidable foe than this unarmed boy.

"They are chasing me as a rebel," explained the intruder, still panting for breath. "We are beaten. We lost the fight early this morning and the king's troops are hunting the leaders."

He paused and listened.

"But you are not a leader!" cried the girl. "If I were a rebel, I would show more——"

She was interrupted by the sound of voices at no great distance outside.

The lad sprang towards her and clasped her by the arm.

"They are coming! You think I am a coward, perhaps I am, but it is hard to die so young—to be murdered for what you haven't done! Won't you help me?"

The last words were spoken so pleadingly that Madge wasted no time in reasoning. Her heart triumphed over her head, and without giving a thought to the possible consequences of her action, she caught him by the arm and hurried with him to a door hidden behind a curtain at one end of the room.

"Come down here!" she commanded, leading the way down an awkward flight of steps, resembling a ladder more than a staircase, into a cellar from which came a mouldy odour that suggested disuse. "It's not a nice place, and there are rats sometimes, but a man isn't afraid of rats like a woman. I can hide you down here."

"I must choose between rats and butchers," responded the lad with a slight shiver. "But there is no choice."

The girl led him to the farther end. There was no light; the opening through which the light had entered at one time had long since become overgrown with weeds.

They had to guide themselves round various obstacles, remains of furniture and farming implements and utensils which had for some reason or no reason been stowed away in the cellar from time to time, but at last they reached a huge clothes press very much the worse for wear.

"You had better get in there," said Madge. "It has a lot of rags and rubbish in it and there's no lid, so I don't suppose they would ever think you had hidden yourself in it. The rubbish won't kill you, even if it makes you uncomfortable. Huddle yourself in one corner as much as you can. I'll stir it up a bit, and then if there's a rat inside, perhaps it will jump out. There, jump in!"

Madge left the fugitive to secret himself and hurriedly returned to the kitchen. She had only just time to knock her dress with her hands, in order to shake off traces of dust, when half-a-dozen soldiers headed by an officer entered the room.

"A man has taken refuge in this farm, my girl. Where is he?" The words were spoken sharply, but not unkindly.

It was fortunate for Madge that there was not enough light to enable the officer to see how she had paled at the question. It suddenly dawned upon her that she had been guilty of treason in sheltering a rebel, but it was less on this account than through fear for the safety of the refugee that her face turned colour. Although she had been at considerable pains to find him a hiding place, yet she had not realised the fact that a thorough search might be made for him; she had fancied that she had saved him, but she now recognised that this was a long way from being the case.

As she did not answer promptly, the officer took the matter into his own hands, and, ordering one of his men to light a lantern that stood near the threshold, he handed it to the girl and bade her peremptorily to show them over the house. The girl took the lantern and silently did as she had been ordered.

Three or four men were left on guard round the house, while the officer and the remaining two or three soldiers followed Madge Forster.

She led them from one apartment to another—the parlour, dairy and bedrooms upstairs, they climbed the ladder into a loft, looked out on to the roof, and, in short, made a thorough search, stripping the beds and omitting nothing.

They descended the stairs, fuming at their non-success and went out into the garden and then to the few sheds and out-buildings.

"I think you are wasting your time," remarked Madge quietly, her confidence coming back to her. "The fugitive ran through the garden, no doubt, and escaped through that hole in the hedge. My father is a king's man, everybody knows that about here, and the runaways would not venture here. Ah, here comes my father!"

Lambert Forster arrived at this moment and he carried a pitch-fork which he brandished threateningly. He had seen that there was something amiss and had come prepared to do battle for his daughter, who might be in trouble. He was relieved to find that she was safe and to learn exactly what was wrong.

"We must apologise for disturbing your house, but it was on the king's business," said the officer in conclusion. Then, as the thought struck him, he asked:

"Have you a cellar?"

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Forster replied in the affirmative, but declared that the fugitive could not have gained access to it unobserved by his daughter. To Madge's horror the officer decided to make an inspection of the underground space and the party made their way down the steps.

By the light of two lanterns the men searched the cellar until they came to the clothes press.

"Run your sword into that rubbish," commanded the leader, "if he is there we shall soon know."

Three times the sword blade was buried in the rubbish, and just a faint sound made itself heard the last time.

The man looked at his sword and saw that the tip was tinged red.

A murmur of satisfaction came from the soldiers, but at that instant a rat poked itself through the rubbish, leapt over the side and darted away.

"You have plunged your sword into a rat!" cried Madge, forcing herself to laugh boisterously.

She knew well enough that the soldier's weapon had touched the fugitive, but she was trying to divert attention.

Her father joined in the laugh quite innocently, and the soldiers, not relishing ridicule any more than the rest of mankind, desisted from further search.

Madge was in an agony of apprehension after the soldiers had retired from the farm; she feared that the fugitive might be dangerously wounded, but she dared not tell her father that she had hidden him. She had to wait till he was in bed and asleep before she could venture into the cellar.

She found him sitting on the side of the press, a picture of despair and misery. His right arm was bound round, near the wrist, by a strip of linen.

"Thank heaven that you have come to me!" he cried in evident relief.

She had placed the lantern on a pile near her and it gave them enough light to see each others faces.

"You are brave—for a girl, as brave as many men," continued the hunted rebel fervently.

"It was my duty," stammered Madge, with downcast eyes. To have one of the opposite sex speak to her like this was a new experience.

"You are a girl whom I could love with all my heart. May I kiss you?"

Madge made no reply, but her hands trembled and her head drooped.

She did not resist as the lad bent slightly, for he was a little taller than she, and imprinted a kiss upon her lips.

"Now I must go and endeavour to reach a place of safety before morning," he said.

But Madge detained him; he must have something to eat first, and she also tried to persuade him to wait until the following evening, when it would certainly be safer to make the venture.

The fugitive consented to the first proposition, but declined to agree to the second. Madge fetched him something to refresh himself, and brought him some feminine clothes, which, she said, he could don as a disguise for greater safety.

When the lad emerged from the cellar after making the change of clothing, Madge could not help admiring what an admirable girl he made.

"I must go now, my dear Miss Forster," said he, again taking her hand and clasping it warmly. "I shall never forget what you have done for me. You risked your life to save mine, and I shall come back to you some day to make amends. Good-bye!"

"You will take care?" asked Madge anxiously. "If you were to be caught—oh! I can't bear to think of it!"

The young rebel looked at her curiously for a second. Then he was gone, and the farmer's daughter suddenly remembered that she had never asked his name.

The rebellion was quelled and the life of Forster and his daughter ran its usual peaceful course, undisturbed by the political events which followed during the next three years. Madge had two or three suitors before that time had elapsed, but she gave them no encouragement. Her father could not understand it, but he said nothing, girls were like that sometimes and Madge would alter in time.

But two more years went past, and Madge showed no signs of altering.

She had watched for the return of the fugitive and she would still watch and wait for him. He had said that he would return and she believed that he would come back if he were alive.

The new king was firmly established on the throne and James II. had lost all chance of coming back. Madge had heard the tidings and she wondered whether the young rebel would now be able to seek her out. A few more months passed and Madge's hopes began to sink.

But one summer afternoon her ear caught the sound of bells and she knew that a coach was approaching.

Nearer and nearer came the sound, and then she saw through the window a coach drawn by four horses.

It stopped opposite the house and Madge's heart beat so violently that she could scarcely stand.

She saw the open door and a man descend from the coach; she was disappointed, for this man was much too old to be her unknown friend.

Someone else was about to alight and her eyes were fixed more intently than ever on the door of the coach.

A young woman, beautiful and richly dressed, alighted and ran towards the house.

"It was here!" cried the new-comer. "Ah, there she is, my deliverer!"

She pushed open the door and ran towards Madge with a glad cry, but the latter threw out her arms wildly, swayed a little and then fell unconscious.

The Honourable Betty Harrison was never able to understand the conduct of Madge Forster. She explained to the farmer's daughter that she had adopted male attire and permitted herself to be pursued in order to draw the king's soldiers from the track of her brother, who had been wounded and was lying hidden until help could be obtained. Thanks to Madge, she had succeeded, and all the family had also been successful in getting out of the country; they had remained abroad until the cause of James was utterly lost, when they had concluded that they could return with safety. Betty had taken the first opportunity of visiting the farmer's daughter.

"I might have explained to you," said Betty warmly, "but I thought it best to keep silence."

Madge Forster smiled faintly, but her demeanour was so strange in the eyes of Betty Harrison that the visit was neither so pleasant nor so long as it would otherwise have been.

Betty Harrison always felt somewhat hurt at Madge Forster's pride, as she considered it, for she would accept no money nor any assistance that would take her out of her own humble station of life and make life more comfortable for her, nor did she evince any desire that the friendship so strangely begun should be continued.

Madge Forster never married.

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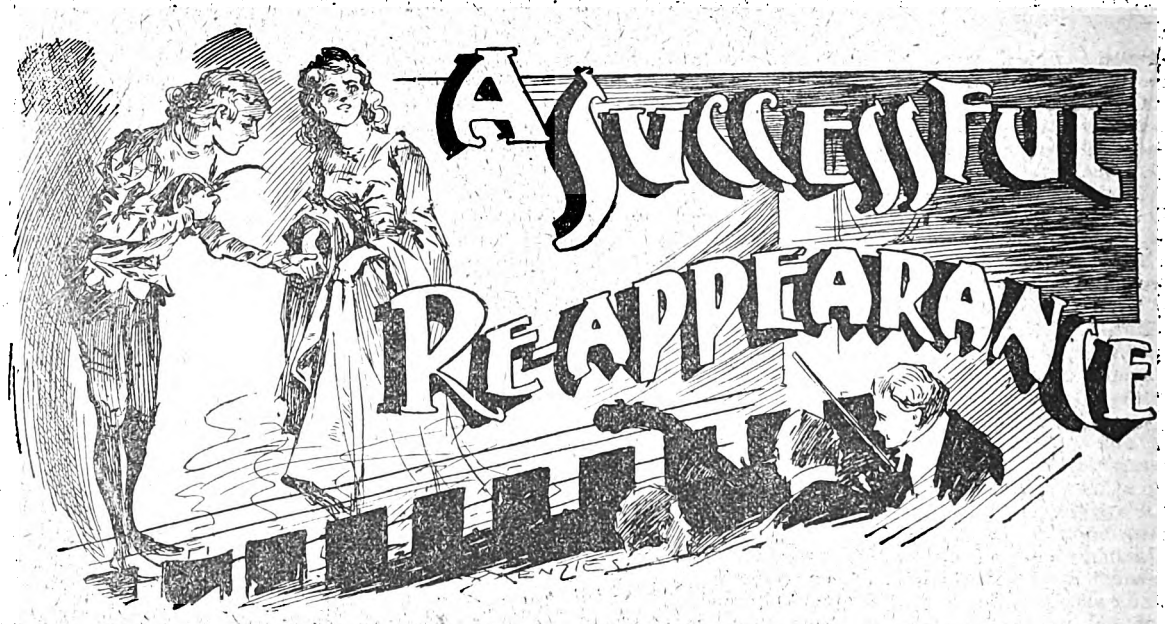

When the theatre-going public thought of Bertram Proctor, which was not often, it was with the impression that he was enjoying well-earned rest in the evening of life.

He had been a great star in his time, but that time was in reality long past, although his final appearance on the stage dated back only five years.

To tell the plain truth, Bertram Proctor had out-lived himself as an actor; he had achieved a great name, and his love for his profession and for celebrity had caused him to remain on the boards until both his bodily and mental faculties began to fail. He would have done far better to have retired years before he actually did seek repose in the little country village where he had first seen the light; everybody said that he was spoiling his reputation, everybody recognised that his day was over, except Proctor himself.

He believed that he was still a grand actor, a leading light of the profession and the idol of the public. So he continued to play his favourite characters in his own theatre, and the illusion was maintained to a large extent by the patrons of his theatre, who applauded him on his occasional appearances more out of pity than by reason of his acting.

It was a sad spectacle to see this broken man trying to throw the same vigour into the parts of Romeo and other characters in which he had made his name in the past; and it was with a sense of relief that the public heard that Bertram Proctor had given up the stage, sold his theatre and retired into "country."

Robert Harlow mused somewhat in this strain as he made his way on foot from the nearest railway-station to the little country house occupied by Procter, his wife and unmarried daughter. Harlow owed a debt of gratitude to Proctor for having given him his first opportunity of showing his ability. From that moment he had steadily mounted the ladder of success.

He had been going to see Proctor time after time since the latter's retirement, but something had always turned up to prevent him; so five years had slipped away and Harlow, awakening to this fact and feeling a sense of shame at his own ingratitude, had seized the chance presented by the brief interval between the production of a new play in order to pay the promised visit.

He was very cordially welcomed by all the family, and was soon comfortably seated with his old friend in a cosy room looking upon a garden that refreshed the eyes after the stolid bricks and mortar of the town; the chairs were placed near the open window, cigars were lighted and the conversation at once fell upon past experiences.

Harlow was grieved to see that time had laid a heavy hand upon Proctor; his face was withered and shrunken, his hands thin and trembling, his frame bent and feeble. It was a curious contrast to turn his eyes from this enfeebled figure to the picture on the wall close by—a drawing of Proctor as Romeo, a man in the flush of manhood, the very embodiment of virility.

Bertram Proctor watched the direction of his gaze and smiled with satisfaction.

"That was drawn a long time ago," he began proudly, "but——"

He was interrupted by a slight fit of coughing.

"You had a long career, sir," said Harlow, speaking with the deference which he had always considered to be due to so great a man. "I can well understand that you desire rest."

His cheeks flushed slightly in spite of himself as he made this remark, for he shared the general opinion that Bertram Proctor ought to have retired long ago and it seemed to him that even the old man's dulled eye would read his thoughts. But he was unprepared for the outburst which followed his words.

"Desire rest! I did not want rest, it was not my wish that we should bury ourselves alive in this place and give up all the glory of the profession! I came here to please my wife and daughter, not myself. I am as strong and as good as ever! I could play Romeo every bit as well now as I could when that picture was drawn." For an instant the old man's eyes gleamed again with the old fire.

Abashed by this unexpected turn of the conversation, Harlow stammered out incoherent words which had no

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meaning. Before he had time to recover himself, Proctor was pulling him by the arm towards the door.

"Come with me and I will show you!" cried the old actor excitedly. "Twelve months ago a man told me that I had lost my power, but I proved that he was wrong. Now I will prove it to you!"

"No, no; you mistake me," expostulated Harlow, still allowing himself to be dragged by Proctor through the passage and up a wide staircase. "I said no such thing; I did not for a moment dream that you could be——".

"Very well!" interrupted Proctor, mollified. "But come along with me all the same. I feel the fire of it on me now and I should like to show you that I am the same as ever."

The visitor yieided to the request and followed his host across a wide landing and into a back room which was fitted in every respect like an actor's dressing room, even to the smallest detail.

Harlow started as he entered, for he recognised that it was an exact counterpart of Proctor's old room at the "Royal."

"There!" cried Proctor, triumphantly, as he noted the look of surprise on Harlow's face. "Ha! ha! Now you go back, go downstairs to my wife and daughter and tell them that I will be down again soon. They'll understand. Ha! ha!"

Much puzzled by the strange behaviour of his old patron, Harlow made his way across the landing and down the stairs, at the foot of which he was met by Mrs. Proctor.

He looked at her inquiringly, but without uttering a word. She shook her head sadly.

"Come with me and wait," she said somewhat mournfully. "He will not be long."

She led him into another room at the end of which was a raised platform and a curtain; chairs were arranged round the room and in the centre, in front of the curtain and platform, as one might imagine an improvised theatre for amateur performances. Silently she conducted him to a seat in the centre, seating herself on his right, while the daughter, just as silently, took a seat on the left.

"Watch us and do exactly as we do," said Mrs. Proctor in a tone of intreaty. "Do this to please him."

More mystified than ever, Harlow nodded in response and waited. He lost himself in a reverie from which he was aroused by the faint tinkle of a bell. Immediately the curtain went up, discovering Proctor dressed as Romeo.

With faltering voice and trembling figure, the old man went through the balcony scene, trying his very utmost to emulate his former powerful rendering, but making such a grotesque parody that the tears came into Harlow's eyes.

Mrs. Proctor and her daughter acted their parts as spectators to perfection; they applauded the great passages and nudged their guest to do the same whenever he forgot to imitate them.

It was torture to Harlow, and he could see that it was the same to the two women who sat on either side, and he heaved a sigh—as though awaking from some nightmare—when this miserable performance was finished and Proctor had made his bow before the curtain in response to the mock applause of the small audience.

"Come with me and I will show you!" cried the old actor excitedly.

"Now you know better!" cried Proctor triumphantly as he bade his guest farewell on the following day. It was at least the fiftieth time he had made that observation since the previous evening. "They mustn't think

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that I have left the stage for ever; you must tell them, when you get back, they are labouring under a mistake; it was to please my wife and daughter, and I shall make my re-appearance on the old stage before long. Then ——Ah!"

He drew a long breath that said more than half-an-hour's talk could have conveyed.

Six months month later, Harlow received a letter from Mrs. Proctor, inclosing a poster. This bill, and the letter, told him that Proctor was to make his re-appearance on the stage within a fortnight, but this return to professional life was to begin by a performance in the theatre of the market town nearest to Proctor's house.

They had persuaded him to give up his notion of making his first appearance in London, so the actor's wife told Harlow; he was to appear at the theatre as a kind of trial-performance.

He recognised the voices of his wife and the manager.

Mrs. Proctor sent him a ticket, but Harlow was not free and he was sincerely glad that he had a good excuse, for he could not bear to think what the result would be. He heard it all, a little later.

The special performance of "*Romeo and Juliet*" was billed all over the little town, and the name of the once celebrated Bertram Proctor met the gaze of the public once more in bold type. "Re-appearance of Bertram Proctor in his creation of Romeo," and other notices to that effect were to be met everywhere. The old actor himself was full of pride and confident that a glorious reception awaited him on his return to the stage; he chafed at the notion of beginning a new lease of professional life under such conditions, even although there was only to be one performance in this out-of-the-way place, but it was to please his wife and daughter, and he would soon be in London again!

At last the great evening arrived, and Proctor and his two faithful companions made their way to the theatre. Although it was yet early, there was a crowd outside the doors and a faint cheer arose as they passed through the people to the stage-door. The old Romeo's face became tinged with red and his eyes lighted up with pride.

"You see how they welcome me," he whispered to his wife as the door closed behind them. "Ah! It will be a glorious night."

The theatre was filled with people eager to give Bertram Proctor a good reception. That was the impression which the actor himself, taking a peep at the auditorium before the play began, derived from the appearance presented by the interior of the theatre.

There was to be another little scene — concerning which he had only just been informed—he was to be presented with an illuminated address at the close of the performance in recognition of his services to the histrionic art, and as an expression of good wishes for his future career.

The curtain rose and the play proceeded; the entrance of Romeo was a signal for a storm of applause which prevented the actor from speaking for at least two minutes.

It was a feeble performance, making a farce of the tragedy, but the audience was sympathetic and applauded boisterously all the important passages. When the curtain fell, Proctor was called in front, and then the presentation was made by the manager.

No man ever was more happy and more proud, no actor was ever more confident of himself, than was Proctor as he went back to his dressing room to change his clothes and get rid of his make-up in order to rejoin his wife and daughter who were waiting for him in the manager's small private room off the main entrance. He had proved to the world—for the market town was now "the world" to him, seeing that the success of the evening would be told in the newspapers all over the country—that he was still the same, that "Richard was himself again," as he phrased it. If he had been received with such warmth by these people, what would his reception be among the intellectual theatre-goers of the Metropolis and the Great Cities!

When he emerged from the dressing-room, the short,

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tortuous flight of stairs leading to the lobby was in darkness. The audience had dispersed half-an-hour before, the attendants were waiting to lock up and all the lights were out, even those in the lobby and at the door. Holding the address carefully, lovingly, in his left hand, he descended the stairs and passed along the lobby, wondering where the two women were waiting for him.

He observed a thin streak of light which he concluded to indicate that a door was not quite closed; that must be the manager's room, and he would find them waiting for him there. He hurried towards this door and was about to push it open when the sound of voices, as though of persons arguing some disputed point, reached his ears and brought him to a standstill. He recognised the voices of his wife and the manager.

"I think that is rather too much," Mrs. Proctor was saying. "I admit that there was some trouble connected with it, but I think you ought to be able to do it for less than that."

"My dear Madam," replied the manager testily—how different was his tone now from what it had been when making the presentation!—"I can't do it for one penny less! Trouble, indeed! I should think so! I don't say that we are doing very good business just now, but you will understand that we have the usual expenses this evening and that we have not taken one sixpence at the door. I——"

"But surely your expenses, together with the loss of profit, do not reach the figure you are asking!" expostulated Mrs. Proctor speaking firmly, but sadly.

"There was the cost of the address," continued the manager, who was evidently annoyed, "and in addition to all that, I actually had to pay or give free drinks to a lot of the people who were in the theatre to-night in order to get them to come and sit it out. Why, not half of them would have entered the theatre at all to see the old man make a fool of himself, and I'm quite sure that not one of them would have sat it out! Well," he concluded in a milder tone, as he saw how his words pained the good woman. "I don't think so. Look here I'll knock off £5. You know, if you get up little deceptions of this kind just to please the old—gentleman, and make him believe that he is still a great actor, you must pay for it. Now, that settles it. Hallo, what's that?"

He had heard a noise outside. Proctor had listened to it all; the scales had fallen from his eyes and he mentally saw himself as others saw him. It was all a hoax—the reception, the applause, the presentation—he had not attracted these people, they had been bribed to come!

He stood for a moment, stunned by the revelation; then there was a singing noise in his ears, everything seemed to be going round and he fell heavily to the ground, still holding the illuminated address.

When the three occupants of the manager's room rushed into the lobby, they nearly fell over the prostrate form which was now lighted up by the glimmering gas jets shining through the open door. They knelt beside him, but Bertram Proctor was dead. He had made his last appearance on the stage of life.

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SUMMARY.

THE steamship *Trojan* is homeward bound from the Cape. On board is Michael Standridge, who is returning to England from the Kimberley diamond fields, in possession of the "Kimberley Elephant," the largest diamond found in the colony. On the ship is his half-brother, Simon Hoathley. On the way up the English Channel the latter steals into the miner's cabin with the intention of murdering him and obtaining possession of the diamond. The miner, however, is on the alert, and presents a pistol at the intruder's head. Knowing that Hoathley will make another attempt to secure the diamond, Standridge resolves to "blind the trail."

As the vessel is passing the Isle of Wight he lowers himself into the water and swims to the shore. Michael sells his diamond for £20,000 to Messrs. Strauss and Lightfoot, whose clerk, Swinley Tasker, he discovers in an attempt to rob him of £85. Michael reads Tasker a lecture, kicks him, and departs—having made an enemy of this rascal. Reading is where Michael expects to find news of his daughter, and he purchases Kennett's Cross, a dilapidated farmhouse in the neighbourhood, this house meeting his requirements by being very secluded, and on a clay soil suitable for brickmaking.

CHAPTER IV. (*continued*).

The one with whom Michael came most into contact was Cuthbert Blakesly, the cashier at the Metropolitan Counties Bank at Reading. It was Blakesly's duty to attend to the frequent drains which Michael made on his banking account, and the young man necessarily knew more of "Mr. Wilson's" business than anyone in those parts, save Mr. Oakley, the manager. The rugged old miner took rather a fancy to the stalwart athlete who had been "meant for a soldier," but owing to family reverses was constrained to earn his bread by shovelling sovereigns across the counter.

"You ought to be out in the 'fields,' my lad, with a pick and a shovel in those strong hands of yours," Michael said one day, "you'd find getting the stuff for yourself pleasanter work than messing it about with that scoop for other folk."

Cuthbert smiled at the eccentric customer and told him he should like it well enough if he hadn't certain reasons for staying in England.

"But you've let the cat out of the bag at last, Mr. Wilson," he continued. "I should never have had the impertinence to broach the subject myself, but your remark suggests that you have done some gold digging yourself."

Then Michael thawed a little, and described some of his earlier experiences in America, without giving any inkling of his later South African exploits. A mutual liking sprang from the business acquaintance thus begun, and on one or two occasions when Michael was in Reading he entertained the cashier at luncheon at the hotel. His fellow clerks and others, in chaffing Blakesly, prophesied that it was only a question of time before he would be admitted to the mysteries of Kennett's Cross. But months went by without the young man being invited to cross the threshold of Michael's hermitage, and nothing came of the friendly chats, except that Cuthbert Blakesly was accounted by popular rumour to be on intimate terms with the recluse.

Like most of its kind the rumour was exaggerated, but it had its effect on the events which were to come.

And rumour shortly afterwards had something more congenial to feed on when it became known that the owner of Kennett's Cross had purchased from a marine store dealer in the town a secondhand strong-room door, built of iron, and furnished with an impregnable lock, which he had carted off to the lonely house at the cross roads.

The gossips wagged their heads freely over the episode for a week or two, firmly establishing Michael's reputation as the possessor of hoarded wealth, and then, as generally happens when doubt about a new comer's affairs has grown into certainty, the public interest in him began to decline.

It was after Michael had finished making and laying his bricks that he found his daughter. Spring had come round again when, a week before the May-day with which this chapter opened, he was driving home from one of his periodical journeys into Reading for supplies. He had got well out into the open country, and was passing the grounds of "The Limes," when he met with an accident, trifling enough in itself but pregnant with consequences.

Owing to a defective linch-pin one of the wheels of the cart came off, and Michael was thrown out on to the turf at at the side of the road. He was a bit shaken by the fall, but he was able to pick himself up and to secure the frightened pony before more damage was done. There was no one in sight to give him a helping hand, so he hitched the pony to the gate of "The Limes," and, with a colonial's faith in the hospitality of his fellow creatures, started up the drive to the house to procure the necessary assistance.

As he was traversing that portion of the drive which skirted the shrubbery he heard voices, and, on emerging into a full view of the house and garden, he saw that the sounds proceeded from a party taking tea on the lawn. Two ladies, one elderly and extremely stout, the other young and slim, were seated in hammock chairs, while a gentleman in knickerbockers—presumably the owner of a bicycle that was leaning against a tree—stood talking to them, cap in hand. Michael approached the group and was commencing to speak of his accident when he was surprised to recognise in the attendant cavalier none other than his friend the cashier at the bank. Cuthbert, as soon as he grasped the situation, stopped his request with ready offers of help, and putting down his cup at once prepared to accompany Michael to the scene of the disaster.

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"This is a friend of mine, Mrs. Bonfield," he said. "You will excuse me, I know, while I go to his assistance. Let me introduce you—Mr. Wilson of Kennett's Cross; Mrs. Bonfield and Miss Bonfield."

Michael removed his hat from his grizzled head and bowed politely to the elder lady, and turned with the same intent towards her companion. The girl was wearing a large sun hat, and as she raised her hand to acknowledge his salute, Michael caught his first full view of her features. The effect upon him was startling in its suddenness and painful in its intensity. With a quick gesture he raised his hand to shade his wondering eyes, drew back a pace or two, then started forward, and exclaimed in a breaking voice:

"It is her living image; I cannot be mistaken! Madam," he went on, turning passionately to Mrs. Bonfield, "I intreat you to pardon me and to grant me the favour of a few minutes conversation alone. I will explain my strange behaviour, and you, perhaps, can explain that which will make it seem not so strange after all."

Mrs. Bonfield showed little less perturbation at the unexpected development than Michael himself, and evinced a nervous anxiety that he should say no more before the young people.

"Marion, dear," she said quickly, "you had better run into the house for a little while, and you, Mr. Blakesly, might go and see after this gentleman's pony."

"Her name is Marion, then!" Michael said, as soon as the two wondering faces had disappeared. "Madam, again I beg you to forgive me if I am wrong, but if my instinct prompts me right, that young lady is no child of yours. She is the exact likeness of what my wife was at her age; she is just what my missing daughter should be now; her very name is the same. I have expected to find her in these parts. Tell me, dear lady, and tell me truly; is it as I suppose?"

The mistress of "The Limes" buried her broad face in her hands and began to weep.

"I have always dreaded this day," she almost wailed at last. "It is hard that this should happen after Marion has grown to be so necessary to me. There seems to be a conspiracy to rob me of the girl. First young Blakesly, and now it is you, sir. Who think you has a better right to her than the lonely old woman who has cherished her all these years?"

The implied admission was enough for Michael, and he could afford to wait patiently now for a fuller explanation. By degrees Mrs. Bonfield's agitation subsided, and then she told him the story of her adopted daughter's life, so far as it was known to her.

One winter morning, eighteen years ago, after a terrible snowstorm, the gardener at "The Limes" had come to the kitchen with the startling intelligence that a woman, apparently a tramp, was lying in the shrubbery dead, or dying of the cold, with a child hugged to her breast. Mrs. Bonfield, then, as now, resident at "The Limes"—she incidentally described herself as a widow from the year of her marriage—at once gave orders that the unfortunates should be brought to the house, and that everything should be done for their restoration and comfort.

They were put to bed and a doctor was sent for, but before his arrival the woman died of exhaustion and exposure, after rallying just enough to point to her four-year-old daughter and mutter the one word—Marion. The child recovered under careful nursing, and Mrs. Bonfield had seized the opportunity to relieve her own solitude by adopting the little waif. There were no means of identifying the wanderers. The dead woman's clothes were threadbare and ragged; her boots were dropping from her feet, and it was supposed that she had been making her way to Reading when she crept into the shrubbery to seek some slight shelter from the pitiless fury of the storm. But all was

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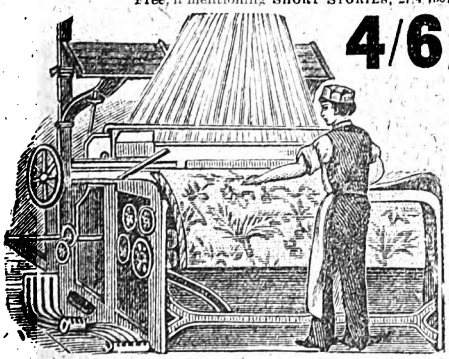

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surmise, and nothing had ever transpired to shed any light on the poor nameless creature's history. All the property found upon her was sevenpence-halfpenny in bronze, while round the child's neck was a necklace of no value made of little shells.

"Pink shells?" interrupted Michael breathlessly.

Mrs. Bonfield assented.

"That clears away the last doubt, then," said Michael. "That poor outcast soul was my wife, and this bonny lass is, indeed, my daughter."

Of Marion's uneventful life at her new home there was but little to tell. Both her infancy and girlhood had evidently been carefully watched and tended, and Mrs. Bonfield had grown to look upon her with real affection; though Michael, deeply grateful as he was, could not help thinking that there was a strong leaven of selfishness in the old lady's protestations of regard. She seemed to think of her adopted daughter chiefly as one who ministered to her real or fancied ailments, and as an indispensable companion to a childless woman.

This feeling was specially noticeable in Mrs. Bonfield's bitter lamentations over the attachment which she described as having sprung up—sorely against her wish—between Marion and the young cashier. She had nothing to urge against Cuthbert Blakesly himself except his obvious desire to rob her of her *protégée*, and now she pathetically bewailed the girl's impending removal by her father.

Altogether, the mistress of "The Limes" impressed the shrewd old traveller as a rather weak and unreliable woman, whose natural good-nature had been brought into subjection by chronic anxiety for her own personal comfort. Michael took the cue, and promptly reassured her as to Marion's removal. He should not dream of taking his daughter away from her kind protectress, at any rate at present—if for no other reason, because he had no home fit to receive her; and as to Cuthbert Blakesly, he should want to know a good deal more of the young man before he sanctioned a definite engagement.

When the shell necklace had been produced and recognised, Marion was sent for, and Michael—calling himself by his own name for the first time since his return—made himself known to his daughter. Mrs. Bonfield, satisfied that the girl would be left with her, corroborated Michael's assertion, and Marion listened eagerly to so much of her childhood's history as he thought well to break to her.

The subtle instinct which is stronger than proof, opened Marion's heart, and she accepted the new position with unfeigned joy, lavishing such tenderness on the battered old wanderer that his soul warmed with the promise of a bright sunset to his stormy life. Then Cuthbert Blakesly was told the news, and Michael Standridge—decidedly the guest of the evening—remained to supper. Before he resumed his interrupted drive to Kennett's Cross he hinted mysteriously at a secret affecting Marion's future, which he should be ready to reveal in a few days. "It is a secret which would have remained a secret if it had not been for this day's discovery," he added.

These events took place on a Saturday, and during the ensuing week Michael spent some portion of every day at "The Limes," father and daughter having many long talks together in the shady old garden. There was no secret about the relationship between the two, and Michael had resumed his own proper name, alleging that the temporary change had been made "for business reasons," and would be more fully explained when he divulged the secret to which he had alluded. He spoke freely to Marion about Cuthbert Blakesly, and, without committing himself to the definite sanction of an engagement, expressed no dissatisfaction at Cuthbert's visits to "The Limes."

So it was that when Saturday came round again Marion was sitting, as we have seen, in the rose garden, waiting in the first place for her father, who had as yet failed to keep his promise of looking in during the morning, and, secondly, for Cuthbert Blakesly, whose employment at the bank set him free at an earlier hour on the last day of the week. Mrs. Bonfield was indulging in a siesta, and Marion was in hopes that one or both of her visitors would arrive in time for a long chat before the old lady awoke. It was already considerably past Cuthbert's usual hour, and the girl was beginning to grow impatient when her lover's tall figure appeared in the entrance of the rose garden, and in another moment he was at her side.

"How late you are, Cuthbert," said Marion after the first greeting. They were on very good terms, these two.

"I came on foot, dear," explained the young man, picking a spray of yellow jessamine and squeezing the scented blossoms in his palm. "My bicycle wanted cleaning, so I left it at home to-day."

"I know you are very particular about the brightness of that wonderful machine," laughed Marion; "but the roads have been so hard and dry lately it cannot have been very bad. I will forgive you, though, now that you are here. I wonder where father is," she added. "He said he would come this morning, but he has not been yet. Has he been at the bank? Have you seen anything of him?"

"No," replied Blakesly, "he has not been to our place to-day. I have not seen him since——" Here the cashier paused to drive away a bee that was buzzing over Marion's head, and when he resumed, he appeared to have lost the thread of his sentence. "Let me see," he continued, "I met Mr. Standridge here on Wednesday evening, and he was at the bank on Thursday. You, I suppose, have seen him since then?"

"He was with me yesterday," said Marion. "He spoke a good deal of you, and kindly; but he does not seem to have made up his mind as yet."

"That bears out——" Cuthbert was beginning, but he checked himself and went on, "I mean, I feel quite certain, dear, it will be as we wish; but he naturally wants to know a little more of me before he intrusts his new-found treasure to my care."

"I wish the dear old man would give up living at that outlandish place all alone," said the girl. "I begged him to let me come and keep house for him, but he would not hear of it. His gratitude towards Mrs. Bonfield is the reason, I think. He will not even allow me to go to see him there till he has told me his wonderful secret, and that is not to be till he has 'provided me a bodyguard,' he said. What could he mean by that?"

"I don't know, dear, unless I am to be the bodyguard," said Cuthbert, thoughtfully. "But we shall see your father in a minute, I think. Did you not hear the sound of wheels stopping at the gate?"

The two sat in silence, waiting for the stalwart form of the old miner to appear at the gap in the privet hedge. The bees hummed among the roses, and a blackbird in the shrubbery was commencing his evening song. All was peaceful and calm, with the moving stillness of country springtime, and for a moment or two, as the lovers waited, the very air seemed charged with happiness. Then footsteps sounded on the gravel drive, and Marion's hand stole out to rest for one brief second on Cuthbert's arm.

"You must learn to love my father for my sake, dear," she whispered, as a black shadow darkened the entrance to the rose garden.

But it was not her father who brought their privacy to an end. The superintendent of the county police stepped quickly through the opening, followed by an inspector and a constable in uniform. Cuthbert, as he sprang to his feet to meet them, noticed that they all looked very grave.

"Is anything wrong at the bank, Mr. Gunning?" he asked, addressing the superintendent, whom he knew very well.

"Not at the bank, Mr. Blakesly," said the official, glancing past him to Marion, and lowering his voice a little as he went on; "it is something more serious. It is my duty to inform you that anything you say will be taken down and

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1. CH-M-E-LA-N	A noted Parliamentarian.	6. B-D-N P-W--L	A South African Hero.
2. T-N-YS-N	A noted Poet.	7. B-E-H-M	A noted Pill Maker.
3. D-CK-NS	A noted Author.	8. L-V-R-O-L	An English City.
4. N-P-LE-N	A noted General.	9. TH-M-S	A noted River.
5. WE--INGT-N	Another noted General.	10. A-L-N-I-	An Ocean.

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Manager, POPULAR HOME JOURNAL, S.Q., 4 Gray's Inn Road, LONDON, W.C.

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used against you. I have here a warrant for your arrest, Cuthbert Blakesly, on the charge of murdering Michael Standridge — otherwise known as Thomas Wilson—at Kennett's Cross last night. You must consider yourself my prisoner."

CHAPTER V.

Birds of a Feather.

That same afternoon while Marion Standridge sat waiting in the garden of the Limes for the lover who only came to be so sternly snatched from her, and for the father whom she was destined never to see again, another rendezvous of a different character was being kept far away in the hum and turmoil of the Metropolis.

It being Saturday, a matinée performance was in progress at the Royal Music-Hall, and that popular place of entertainment was crammed with sightseers released from toil by the weekly half-holiday. But though the fourth turn was on, and a "star comique" was evoking shouts of laughter from the audience, the entertainment seemed to have no attraction for Mr. Swinley Tasker. The diamond-broker's clerk had been one of the first to pay for admission at the box-office, but instead of passing into the auditorium he had remained in the long vestibule, pacing impatiently up and down, and scanning with an almost hungry eagerness the faces of those who entered from the street.

As an habitué of the place, Mr. Tasker had a free-and-easy acquaintance with most of the other habitués, and from time to time he was spoken to by individuals of anything but Exeter Hall appearance as they traversed the vestibule. By many of them he was chaffed upon his lonely vigil, and by some he was pressed to come inside to the bar, but his suave manners seemed to have deserted him for once, and he persistently and curtly declined to be seduced from his post. At length, however, a more than usually boisterous party of deadheads came in and, surrounding Mr. Lightfoot's clerk with noisy greetings, insisted on his "standing treat to the crowd."

The new arrivals were members of the staff of the *Yeller Feller*, a sporting newspaper of lively tendencies which chiefly throve by the peculiar method of chronicling the orgies, real or supposed, of its contributors. Under the necessity of imparting realism to their "copy," these worthies spent their lives and themselves in a weary round of alcoholic "gaiety," and formed the centre round which revolved the shop-boy Bohemianism of London. They were all written of, and known by, more or less descriptive *sobriquets*, and it was considered quite the smart thing by would-be fast clerks to be on speaking terms with the "Piffler" and the "Slinker" of the *Yeller Feller*.

Swinley Tasker set much store by the acquaintance he had scraped with these roystering blades, and in his desire to cultivate intimate relations with them did not see his way to declining the proposal without endangering his footing.

With the best grace he could assume he therefore joined the party and accompanied them to the bar in the auditorium, where conviviality soon became the order of the day. Nevertheless, he remained nervous and preoccupied, and every now and then his eyes would stray to the entrance despite his efforts to be sociable.

"You fellows are late to-day—behind your usual time, I think?" he said, when they had pledged each other in the solemn fashion affected by boon companions.

"Yes," replied one; "we were waiting for Phipson of the *Evening Telegraph*. He's a pal, you know—always round the town with us. The poor beggar couldn't get away because their last edition had to be kept back a bit over some murder down in the country."

"Gad," said Tasker with an attempt at gaiety, "you journalists are no better than slaves. Fancy being kept in like a schoolboy because some joker has committed murder fifty miles away."

"The doing of the deed would be more in your line, eh, old chap?" retorted the "Slinker" with what passed for ready wit in his circle. "But here comes Phipson," he added, as a seedy-looking, washed-out, young-old man came up to join them. "Well, you dilatory crime-monger; what is this tragedy that has kept you?"

"I don't know much more than you do," was the reply. "The details we expected are not forthcoming, and we went to press without them—nothing but the bare fact. As it stands at present, the case doesn't seem to be of any unusual interest."

"I'll bet you anything you like I can repeat word for word one line of your paragraph about it," said another of the sporting journalists.

"You mean the usual statement that the police are in possession of a clue which they are confident will lead to an early arrest?" returned Phipson. "Yes, that's in, of course."

"What is the locality?" put in Tasker indifferently, and for the sake of joining in the conversation. Even while he spoke he was still throwing those furtive glances towards the entrance to the hall.

"Somewhere down Reading way," replied the *Evening Telegraph* man. "Victim's name either Standridge or Wilson—there seems to be some muddle about it—but the first telegram said he was an old man with money. A common case of burglary and murder, I should say, with nothing sensational in it. But hang the shop. Here come the Sisters Milwood; it is the only 'turn' here I'm not tired of."

It was perhaps fortunate for Swinley Tasker that the popular favourites made their *entrée* at that moment, for the eyes of the party were directed at the twin visions of bespangled beauty on the stage, and so missed seeing the ashy grey pallor which stole over his face at Phipson's words, and the reeling stagger that nearly brought him to the ground. With a great effort Tasker steadied himself by clutching the bar while he gulped down the remainder of his drink, and then slipped back into the vestibule, his retreat covered by the tumultuous applause that greeted the first shrill notes of the "Sisters" duet. With those raucous tones and the braying of the orchestra dinning in his ears he hurried to the street door and had not long to wait before a newspaper boy hove in sight crying the last edition of the *Evening Telegraph*.

Quickly grabbing a copy Tasker sat down on one of the sofas in the vestibule, and turned the sheet about till he found what he wanted. The paragraph on which his attention finally became riveted ran as follows:

MURDER NEAR READING.

Early this morning it was discovered that Michael Standridge, an elderly gentleman residing alone at Kenuett's Cross, five miles from Reading, had been brutally murdered during the night by some person who up to the time of telegraphing is still at large. The deceased, who was also known by the name of Wilson, was supposed to be possessed of considerable property, robbery being doubtless the motive of the crime. The police were quickly on the spot, and we understand that they have been so hot on the scent that an arrest may be expected at any moment.

The muscles of Tasker's mobile features twitched as he read, and he was about to peruse the notice a second time, when the shadow of a skinny finger fell upon the paper, and he became conscious that someone was standing over him. Looking up with a start his nervous gaze was met by a burning eye, whose fellow was wandering off in the direction of the curtain that veiled the entrance to the auditorium.

"It's cheering to think they have got a clue, my young friend, isn't it?" said the owner of the uncanny optics, pointing to the paper. "What a debt of gratitude we owe to the police for their ever-watchful care."

The sudden alarm on Tasker's face became blended with an admixture of surprised relief as he recognised in the spare, black-coated figure bending over him the person with whom he was keeping tryst.

(To be continued.)

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A GREAT OFFER.

The *Daily Express* has made an exclusive arrangement with Messrs. W. and R. Chambers, the well-known publishers, by which ten thousand sets of "Chambers's Encyclopædia" (Twentieth Century Issue) are to be distributed to its readers at a specially low price, and on the popular plan of payment by monthly instalment.

The Twentieth Century Chambers's is not a reprint off obsolete plates, like so many other Cyclopædias recently offered, but is entirely fresh and up to date in every particular. It contains upwards of 30,000 articles, each giving information abreast of the times in this present year. In the Twentieth Century "Chambers's," under the letter E, you will find "Edward VII." with a full account of his accession; under V an obituary notice of the late Queen Victoria.

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Cut Out this Application Form *and hand it at once with 3s. to your Bookseller or Newsagent for transmission to the* DAILY EXPRESS. *Subscribers desiring to complete the purchase in a single payment need only send name and address, making cheque or money order payable to the order of Lloyd's Bank Ltd. If cloth set is desired, enclose £3 15s.; if Half Morocco, £5 12s. 6d.*

To the General Manager, DAILY EXPRESS,
17 Tudor Street, London, E.C. Date.....1901.

I enclose 3s. Please send me Chambers's Encyclopædia (20th Century Issue).

[Strike out one of these lines.] I (a) Cloth, for which I agree to make to you, or to anyone you may appoint, nine further payments of 8s. 6d. each.
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my next payment upon delivery of the complete ten volumes, and my succeeding payments on the corresponding day of each month following. Until such payments are completed, I engage that the volumes remain your property, and shall not be disposed of by sale or otherwise. I further agree that if, owing to unforeseen circumstances, of which you shall be the judge, the volumes cannot be delivered, the return of this deposit of 3s. shall cancel this agreement.

[N9] [Signed] .....

[Rank or Occupation] ..... [Address].....

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

Once upon a time Byron wrote that "one drop of ink" properly used, was calculated to "make millions think." A poor prosaic editor has evidently made *one* reflect, by a few words written a week or two ago. Thus writes the one, a young lady living north of the Tweed:

"In *Short Stories* there is a letter from Reggie bemoaning the humdrum spirit of the times. Now, my dear editor, don't be cross with me, will you? [Of course not.—Ed.] and don't think me rude if I ask whether your correspondent is Mr. S. B., of ——— Street, Derby. I shall be everlastingly indebted to you if you will favour me. You see, I used to know someone of that name. I was awfully unkind to him, and now I would like to make amends if it is not too late."

There, what think you of that? Are not those few simple sentences suggestive of a real life romance? Love, probably unrequited, and now a desire on the maiden's part to make amends. Alas, poor maiden! my previous correspondent was not S. B. of Derby. Therefore, I cannot help you, unless, mayhap, these words should meet the eye of your erstwhile friend. In which case, perhaps, he will drop me a line.

❦❦❦

"If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try, again," is the motto of Mrs. E. R. (Bradford). "Many thanks for your beautiful book," she writes. "On opening *Short Stories* of April 13th, and seeing Miss A. N.'s letter, I thought I would just drop a line. I am quite sure if Miss A. N. will only be a constant reader and sender of storyettes every week, never miss, she will in time receive a prize. I myself have been a constant sender, also reader, of your most interesting paper for quite three years, and have received a good few books, also the guinea prize. The papers I always give to my friends when we have read them, and I show my prizes to everybody I come across, knowing that by doing so I have got a good few new readers."

❦❦❦

For which I tender my most sincere thanks. If only every reader would do likewise, I—but you will do likewise, won't you?

❦❦❦

No, "Kitcat," I am not going to throw open the columns of *Short Stories* to the publication of the idiotical riddles you refer to. However, I print the one you send, hoping that the contemplation of it in cold type will fill you with remorse. Here it is:

What was it Ag-(k) new?
The place where Gains burrow (Gainsborough).

You really think that funny "Kitkat"? Dear me!

❦❦❦

"Sam" is deeply in love with "Clara," and he believes she loves him in return. But for the life of him he cannot pluck up courage to ask her to be his wife. For three years they have "kept company," and for months past he has periodically resolved to put the momentous question, but at the critical moment his courage has oozed out of his boots. "What am I to do?" he asks. "Please don't advise me in general terms, but do try and give me a specific plan. I have thought of getting a friend to propose for me. What do you think of the plan?"

Bad, "Sam," bad. Send another fellow to propose for you, and you run the risk of losing your girl, even as Miles Standish did. And I am not sure that you wouldn't deserve it. Since, however, you seem to be very fond of "Clara." I'll help you all I can. I'll propose for you myself. Here goes:

"Miss Blank—Clara—forgive Sam, but he loves you with a love that is stronger than life. From the moment when his eyes first encountered your radiant orbs, his heart has been filled with a consuming affection for you. For years he has been happy in the contemplation of your surpassing loveliness. He has basked in the sunshine of your eyes, your hair is more beautiful to him than gold, your teeth more precious than pearls, your lips more priceless than rubies. Have pity, Clara—pity on your lovesick Sam. Clara, will you be Sam's wife?"

There, "Sam," you can cut this paragraph out and send it to "Clara."

❦❦❦

"Bobs."—Doctors all agree in telling us that we do not eat sufficient fruit, which is infinitely more productive of health and beauty than sweets and pastry. Ripe apples are especially healthy, and children may eat them without danger. Some doctors say that an apple at bedtime produces sleep. Pears are liked better than apples, but are not so healthy, unless cooked. Prunes have medicinal qualities which cannot be denied. They are better cooked, however. Apricots are also more healthy cooked than raw. Peaches are very healthy. The most healthy of all fruit, however, are grapes. Gooseberries and currants are best cooked. Figs are also excellent; they were in great favour with ancient Roman ladies, who always ate them for breakfast. Pineapples are said to be the best cure for dyspepsia yet known. Oranges are also excellent as a cure for dyspepsia. Lemons produce cheerfulness and prolong life.

❦❦❦

"Telescope" (Burnley). — The longest name ever given to an English child—and it is to be hoped, to any child in a civilized country—is Anna Bertha Cecilia Diana Emily Fanny Gertrude Hypatia Inez Jane Kate Louise Maud Nora Ophelia Quince Rebecca Starkey Teresa Ulysses Venus Winifred Xenophon Yetty Zeus Pepper, daughter of Arthur Pepper, laundryman, and Sarah, his wife, who was born at West Derby, Liverpool, on December 17th, 1882. The Rev. Ralph William Lyonel Tollemache-Tollemache had a fondness for long names. His eldest boy was christened Lyulph Yderallo Odin Nestor Egbert Lyonel Toedmag Hugh Erchenwyse Saxon Esa Cromwell Orme Neville Dysart Plantagenet.

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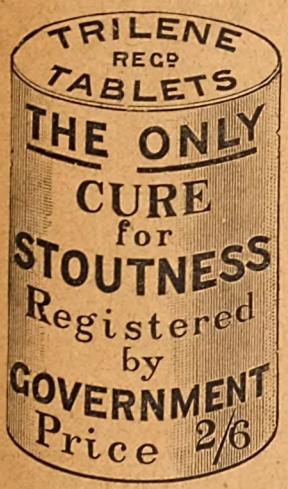

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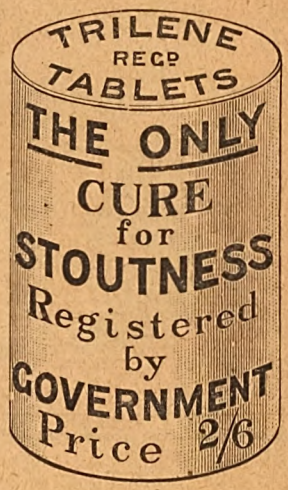

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely. You have our united thanks, and if I can do anything to promote your interests I will freely use my utmost endeavours to do so.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

Mrs. DARNLEY SMITH, Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, writes: "Trilene Tablets have reduced my weight very much. I am so much lighter in every way, and better in health."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

Miss CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st. and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

"77 Hindhill Street, Heywood, February 5th, 1898.

"Gentlemen,—I have not quite finished the box of Tablets and am 21lb. lighter. The change is great, and several friends are beginning the treatment, which not only reduces fat but strengthens rheumatic joints—such has been the case with me. "Yours sincerely, M. A. HEYWOOD."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Risceholme Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if the had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

Mrs. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44, Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

A. M. PRATT of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mr. WALKER, 236 London Road, Hazelgrove, Stockport, says: "I have used one box and am 14lb. lighter. Send another soon as possible."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs, says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs E. ALEXANDER, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They have reduced me quite 2 stone, and I am now quite cured."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Mrs. TAYLOR-ROBINSON, of Tweed Green House, Whalley Range, Manchester, says: "I feel so much lighter and better since taking your Tablets, and am so much thinner that I hardly recognise myself."

Miss A. LONG, of 9 South Parade, Waterford, writes: "Your Tablets have reduced me 14lb."

Miss A. DAWSON, 62 Orchard Street, Weston-super-Mare, says: "Glad to say the Tablets have sufficiently reduced me. I shall always recommend them."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Weymouth Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2 st. and am sufficiently reduced."

Mrs. DREW, of 1 Bellevue Gardens, The Nursery, Devizes, writes: "I took Tablets some years ago; they soon reduced me and I have not got stout since. Send me a box for my mother."

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SHORT STORIES

No. 644.] For the Week Ending May 4th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

A Keeper of Secrets

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Being Days in the Professional Life of the late Mr. Hugo Pontifex, the Famous West-end Solicitor.

To those who had only met him casually in Society, the late Mr. Pontifex was a good-tempered mystery. Bluff, handsome, and, in spite of his middle-age, a little of a dandy, he seemed the last man in the world to deserve his reputation, which was that of the keenest, most audacious, and unerring of family lawyers. Fair-haired, and powerful as an athlete, his striking appearance was increased by his eyes, one of which was grey and one blue.

In reality, however, Hugo Pontifex had a wide and almost exclusively aristocratic practice. He seldom briefed a barrister, seldom set foot in a court of justice, but single handed he hunted down, captured, and safely buried mystery after mystery of terrible import to Mayfair and Belgravia.

An expert in strangling scandal, he lived a life of enthralling interest, and died a rich man. When his executors went through his papers they found nothing to satisfy their curiosity, though plenty to excite it. Hugo Pontifex knew the value of fire—and the dangers of ink. But from time to time he related to the writer, who enjoyed a certain measure of his confidence, the incidents which form the basis of the following stories. In speaking of these strange fragments of drama, Mr. Pontifex himself employed fictitious names, the present author being left to guess vainly at the identity of the genuine actors.

HIS GRACE OF DARTMOOR'S DAUGHTER.

"WILL Mr. Pontifex be kind enough to visit, at the above address, Convict James Traill, Number 1357, for a short consultation of the utmost importance? James Traill may remark that the last time he had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Pontifex was in the paddock at Epsom, on the occasion of 'Chrysanthemum's' Derby. He hopes that Mr. Pontifex still has his diamond pin. Inclosed, Mr. Pontifex will find the Home Secretary's authorization for a private interview."

This odd missive was delivered to Hugo Pontifex early in the evening of a summer's day that the great solicitor had spent very pleasantly at Lord's. On his way to dine at the Savoy, he paid a flying visit to his office in St. James Street, and received from his deaf clerk, among other correspondence, a blue official envelope, indorsed, "H.M. Prison, Dartmoor." The same ominous inscription topped the letter-paper on which James Traill had penned his brief but striking note.

Mr. Pontifex sat down, tossed his opera-hat—he had called at his chambers to dress—upon the writing-table beside him, and pondered the epistle. What recollection had he of "Chrysanthemum's" Derby or of the paddock at Epsom on that date? And what did Convict James Traill, No. 1357, mean by that enigmatic reference to Mr. Pontifex's diamond pin?

Suddenly the lawyer snapped his thumb and finger crisply together; he had remembered! Some years before, he had been watching the parade for the classic race in question, when a gloved hand touched him upon the arm and a courteous voice warned him that his diamond pin—a favourite and costly ornament—had loosened from his scarf and was on the point of falling.

Hugo Pontifex had glanced up and then bowed respectfully; the person who had accosted him was a popular sportsman and a peer of the realm. The solicitor boasted a wide circle of distinguished acquaintances—his pin had just been preserved to him by the Duke of Litherland. With a jovial acknowledgment of Mr. Pontifex's thanks and a whispered recommendation, "Have a bit on Chrysanthemum," the Duke had passed by and vanished in the crowd.

The lawyer had risked a trifle on the suggested outsider, which won easily, at twenty to one. This was, then, the entire history of Hugo Pontifex's association with "Chrysanthemum's" Derby.

But what could the Duke of Litherland and Mr. Pontifex's diamond pin possibly have to do with Convict James Traill, of Dartmoor? As the solicitor stated the problem thus precisely, he burst into a low whistle—a characteristic sign of intelligence. After

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which he caught up his crush-hat, and, bidding his clerk good-night, went on to the Savoy.

At the close of a merry little dinner-party, Hugo Pontifex drove to his rooms in the Albany, changed his costume, and packed a portmanteau. When the late mail for the West of England drew out of Paddington, the lawyer was on board.

By ten o'clock the next morning he was entering the precincts of the huge convict prison on the Dartmoor plateau.

The document transmitted to him by James Traill proved irresistible, and Mr. Pontifex was soon seated in a bare and gloomy apartment, momentarily expecting the arrival of his strange client. Beyond the glass pane of the door a warder marched to and fro, looking in now and again as he paced his beat.

At length the door was opened, and a powerful figure, of medium height, and wearing the grey and arrow-sprinkled garb of the British convict, advanced towards the solicitor.

"This is Number 1357, sir," said a fresh warder, who had escorted the new-comer.

Mr. Pontifex nodded coolly, and rose from the wooden chair on which he had been lounging. There was the click of a latch and he was alone—with Number 1357.

The lawyer lifted his eyes to the slouching form, and a deep furrow showed itself between his strong brows.

The convict moved, with drooped head, to the table set in a corner of the room, and sank into a chair that brought his back to the glass pane and the sentinel warder. Mr. Pontifex took a seat opposite.

Slowly the prisoner straightened his bent shoulders and the solicitor saw him face to face.

"*Sss-t!*" murmured his client, cautiously; "can you recognise me in this masquerade, Pontifex? I am the Duke of Litherland; did you have anything on 'Chrysanthemum'?"

Hugo Pontifex could not suppress a smile, he had been prepared for the announcement of James Traill's real individuality, and the final clause of the peer's observation tickled him.

"A fiver, at twenty to one," he said, answering the second of the two queries.

The expression on his keen features afforded a sufficient reply to the first.

"I cleared ten thousand over the colt," declared the convict: "heigho, Pontifex, I would give a million for a sniff of the Downs and a glimpse of the crocks at their gallops. But what the dickens am I maundering about; you want to know how I got into this beastly hole, don't you? Well, here goes."

He rested his elbows on the table and propped his shaven chin in his palms.

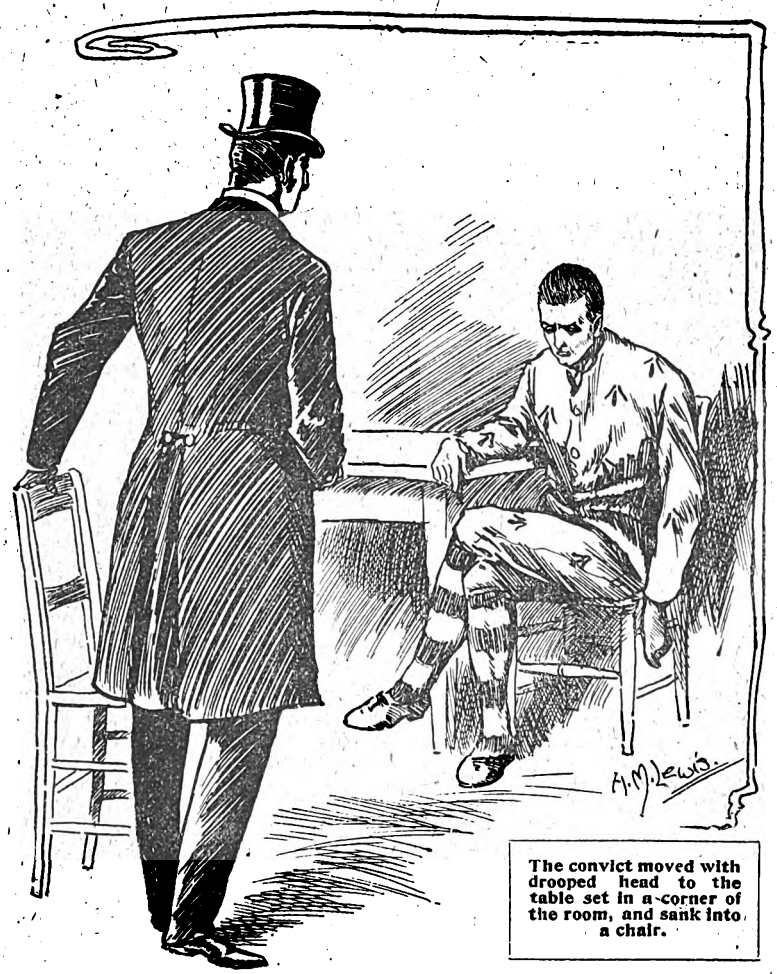
"To the authorities," he pursued, speaking under his breath, "I am James Traill, cracksman, sentenced twelve months ago at the Old Bailey to five years' penal servitude for breaking into the London residence of the Honourable Lewis Thorne."

"Lewis Thorne!" softly interpolated the lawyer, who was familiar with his Peerage; "he is your nephew, is he not, and heir to the title?"

"Quite so," was the response, "and worst of all, my relentless enemy. He has, however, some excuse for his hatred of me—I killed his brother Bob at a sheep-shearing in Western Australia, when I was Lord Randal Haughton, and travelling, beautifully hard-up, under the alias of James Traill. Bob Thorne was a rival of mine in the affections of a certain lady, I cut him out, he planned to do for me, and I shot him on sight."

"Without taking the precaution to secure proof of his resolve to assassinate you?" surmised Mr. Pontifex.

"You've hit it," said his client mournfully. "Finding that I had committed an error of judgment, I slipped out of the colony, resumed my own name, and got to Melbourne, to learn that my mother's uncle had died and left me an extremely convenient legacy. I returned to Western Australia, and, disguised by smart tailoring and an English drawl, succeeded in winning and wedding, as Lord Randal Haughton, the lady for whose sake I



The convict moved with drooped head to the table set in a corner of the room, and sank into a chair.

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had had to give Bob Thorne his quietus. You will not need telling that she knew me to be one and the same with James Traill."

The solicitor was twisting his sapphire ring—in all his chequered experience he had never seen so fantastic a spectacle as that which was presented by this English noble arrayed in the hideous garments of a convict. But the clue to the mystery had not yet manifested itself.

"Ultimately," observed the Duke, "I attained to the dukedom and left the Antipodes for these shores. Then my difficulties commenced; Lewis Thorne was practically a member of my family circle and I could not escape receiving him. He saw the Duchess and was obviously agitated. During my subsequent absence from town he visited her and explained that emotion. He had seen in her the original of a sketch forwarded to him by his brother—a few weeks prior to the latter's death—and purporting to be the likeness of an Australian belle, with whom Bob Thorne confessed himself in love. If my wife could throw any light upon the violent and mysterious end of a man who had loved her devotedly, Lewis Thorne besought her to do so."

The speaker sighed and ran his fingers through his closely-shorn locks.

"I do not blame poor Stella," he added, "she was attacked unawares. But her acute alarm roused Thorne's suspicions instantly, and her terror reached a too suggestive crisis when he asked casually whether I had been in the neighbourhood at the time. From that minute Lewis Thorne was vowed to ascertain my connection with his brother's fate."

Huge Pontifex listened thoughtfully, his shrewd mind registering every detail in the singular narrative which the convict-duke was unfolding.

"Thorne," said his Grace of Litherland, "following the clue provided by the Duchess, had Australia ransacked, by a brilliant detective, for witnesses who might furnish information as to his brother's friends and pursuits. We heard of the search through my wife's people out there, and I sailed to the Antipodes by the next liner. As an amateur spy I did fairly well, and I satisfied myself that, though evidence of the shooting of Bob Thorne by James Traill existed in plenty, but one shred of proof had survived to demonstrate the identity of James Traill and Lord Randal Haughton. That proof was a photograph of James Traill."

A word dropped from the lawyer's lips—it was the curt commentary, "Dangerous!"

"So I felt," agreed the other; "the photo had been the work of an up-country operator and he and the negative had long since disappeared. Only one solitary print remained, and with it the detective left for England. I pursued—overland—spent money like water, and gained London ahead of him, yet failed in each of a dozen plots to abstract the portrait from its custodian on his arrival. He went safely to his employer's residence and came away, with the air of a contented man. That evening I broke into Thorne's house."

Mr. Pontifex nursed his knee attentively—he was absorbed in the tale.

"By the aid of a dark lantern and a professional 'jemmy,'" said the aristocratic convict, "I tracked the photo to a dispatch-box, got it out and burnt it. In the very act of departure I was surprised by Thorne, who had been wakened by some slight sound of mine. He wore a dressing-gown, and carried a double-barrelled gun, loaded. Hardly had he recognised me in the moonbeams than he fired, point-blank. The bulk of the charge missed, but sufficient pellets peppered my countenance to veil my identity during the trial that ensued. Half-blinded, I was given into custody by the frightened servants, tried with my face in bandages,

"Mr. Pontifex?" she said inquiringly. "I believe you are from Devonshire."

and sentenced to five years, as James Traill—my former alias, was the first that came, indiscreetly, I admit, to my tongue. The punishment was stiff, but Thorne had sworn that I attempted to brain him with the steel crowbar I had been using."

Hugo Pontifex regarded his client pityingly. "So this," he decided, "is the true reason for the rumoured disappearance of the Duke of Litherland, a rumour constantly repeated, and as constantly denied, for the last six months. I am afraid, my dear Duke, I can do nothing for you except assure you of my sincere sympathy."

"I do not wish you to aid myself," said the peer, "at least, not directly. Thorne, at present, is my heir, since my only child is a daughter—Adelaide—by my first wife. The Duchess, who recently paid me—as Mrs. Traill—one of the semi-public visits permitted by the authorities, contrived to make me understand that

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Thorne is appealing to the Courts to be allowed to presume my death abroad. Also he is insisting that he must and will marry Adelaide, doubtless to strengthen his claim to presume my death. Should he be refused, he hints to Stella, he can have a certain James Traill tried, on the expiration of his term, for the murder of one Robert Thorne."

The Duke laid his bowed head upon his arms.

"Poor Adelaide," he muttered; "she loves a gallant fellow—an officer and a gentleman. She must suffer in any event—if she does not marry Thorne and he causes a scandal it will probably break off her match with Captain Carruthers."

The solicitor leant forward and placed a firm hand on the peer's shoulder.

"My dear Duke," he observed; "you have communicated with me none too promptly, yet I can help you, notwithstanding. No legal skill could cancel the sentence which you have incurred by your imprudent raid upon Thorne's dwelling. But, for the other matters, leave them to me. I will checkmate Thorne, save your daughter, and keep your secret."

The Duke wrung the lawyer's brown fingers and gasped an indistinct phrase or two. There were tears in his eyes and on the pale skin, still puckered with the scars of the gun-shot wounds inflicted by Lewis Thorne.

Mr. Pontifex took a melancholy farewell of his client; not till he was out of the depressing shadow of Dartmoor did he breathe freely and display his usual elastic stride.

All through the heat of a glorious June day, Hugo Pontifex journeyed from the West, and when night fell he was driving swiftly between the crowded sidewalks of London. His destination was the Duke of Litherland's town house.

At the portal of a tall mansion in Stratton Street his cab stopped. The lawyer descended, paid the Jehu, pulled the heavy brass bell-handle, and produced his card-case, as the double doors swung inward to reveal the liveried stature of a gigantic footman.

"I wish to see the Duchess, if she is in town," said Hugo Pontifex; "should she be away I would be glad to learn her whereabouts. Here is my card—I am a solicitor and my business is urgent."

The footman accepted the pasteboard; he perceived the easy authority of the visitor's bearing.

"Her Grace dined at home this evening, sir," he replied, "with some friends. I will take in your name, sir, if you will step into the library."

The lawyer permitted himself to be shown to the indicated apartment.

"Tell her Grace," he desired, "that I come from Devonshire." The servant bowed and passed out. Mr. Pontifex lay down upon a comfortable settee; he was tired by his eighteen hours of travel.

Five minutes slipped away, and then the *portière* over the entrance rattled its hangers as a woman, in a trailing dinner-dress of black, came through. She was graceful, dark-eyed, queenly. Hugo Pontifex leapt up.

"Mr. Pontifex?" the wearer of the black gown said, inquiringly; "I believe you are from Devonshire."

There was a pathetic gasp beneath the words, and the speaker's fingers were clutching nervously a lace handkerchief.

"I have just arrived from that county, madam," answered Hugo Pontifex. "I was summoned yesterday to—to Dartmoor, to consult with a client. He has resigned into my care a rather delicate situation, turning upon the attitude of a Mr. Lewis Thorne."

The Duchess of Litherland caught at her white throat; she might have been suffocating with alarm. Mr. Pontifex looked at her, unfalteringly, with his strange, dissimilar orbs.

"Is this bluff—or what?" he cried. "Do you realise that I am not to be trifled with?"

"Trust me, madam," he urged; "I will cut the Gordian knot that is being tied about your step-daughter and yourself. I have merely waited upon you to ask if you will arrange for me to meet, as soon as possible, say, under this roof, and, more or less, as if by accident, the Mr. Lewis Thorne to whom I referred. Unimpeachable witnesses—who should be quite unprepared—should be present."

"Mr. Thorne is in the house now," said Stella, Duchess of Litherland, anxiously.

The pretty Australian was trembling with agitation—it was no wonder that so excitable a creature, with a terrible secret on her innocent mind, should have awakened the suspicions that had borne such deadly fruit.

"Excellent," decided the lawyer; "and the witnesses?"

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"My step-daughter," answered the Duchess, quaveringly, "and Captain Carruthers are also here—they and Mr. Thorne have been dining with me. Mr. Thorne was an uninvited, or, to be frank, a self-invited guest."

"Nothing could be better," said Hugo Pontifex; "let us have them in. But you may think that I ought to have submitted my credentials before this, allow me to do so at once."

He gave her the letter which had been sent to him by "Convict James Traill." The Duchess read it, moving aside to an electric pendant. Mr. Pontifex perceived that she kissed it surreptitiously. He affected not to notice the gesture, and, on regaining possession of the missive, thrust it into his pocket-book.

"I understood my client," he told her, "to say distinctly that Mr. Thorne had already initiated an appeal to the courts for leave to presume your husband's death."

"Yes," responded the peeress, "the application is part heard, and evidence has been lodged, on Mr. Thorne's account, suggesting that the Duke had died lately in America." She lifted her large dark pupils to the solicitor; they had a species of desperation in their lustrous depths.

"It may prove useful to be cognizant of that," said Hugo Pontifex; "but the chief thing is that he has committed himself to the application, and, as a consequence, has filed his affidavits. However, if I may trouble you, I will see Mr. Thorne, your step-daughter, and Captain Carruthers. You might convey to them that I have a message from the Duke himself."

"You are very daring!" ventured the Duchess hesitatingly.

The lawyer smiled. "Audacity is my fort," he declared. The other scanned him critically, but with unmistakable hopefulness, and swept her flowing black skirts from the room.

On her reappearance she was accompanied by a lovely girl, whose blue eyes, dazzling complexion, and wealth of red-gold hair, constituted an admirable foil to the dusky beauty of the Duchess. With the two women was a moustached and stalwart cavalier—to the most superficial glance a soldier in mufti. Behind this trio strolled a spare, short person, whose principal characteristics were a pinched Grecian nose and a glossy brown thatch over hollow temples.

"Lewis Thorne!" said Mr. Pontifex to himself, and he was not in error. The introductions vindicated his discernment. As the group ranged itself round him, the solicitor took up a position whence he could scrutinize Lewis Thorne's selfish features.

"Madam," he began; "I will at once deliver the message which the Duke has been pleased to communicate to me, with the request that I should rehearse it also to Mr. Thorne in the presence of witnesses."

The straight thin mouth of Lewis Thorne shaped itself into a sneer; but he said nothing. Hugo Pontifex watched him narrowly.

"It is this," continued the lawyer. "The Duke wishes me to state that he is by no means dead, and has his own reasons for remaining in strict seclusion. He considers that his absence need not delay the proposed marriage between Lady Adelaide and Captain Carruthers. His Grace prefers, indeed, that it should be solemnized at an early date."

The solicitor's eagle glance marked the flush of happy colour in Lady Adelaide's fair face, and marked, too, that the gallant Captain drew nearer to the lovely girl with whom his name had been coupled.

Mr. Pontifex's attention was abruptly diverted to Lewis Thorne; that gentleman had stridden forward, and was glaring insolently at the lawyer.

"Is this bluff—or what?" he cried: "do you realise that I am not to be trifled with."

"Neither am I," said Hugo Pontifex calmly: "Lady Adelaide—Captain Carruthers—my respectful felicitations."

"A truce to compliments!" hissed Lewis Thorne; "or, if Carruthers has a fancy for pretty speeches, I'll make him one. You've been told to play high, my man of law—well, I'll raise the limit. My dear Carruthers, your future wife's papa is, of all places in the world, at Dartmoor."

The Captain stared amazedly at the author of this intimation.

"You seem to be familiar with the Duke of Litherland's motions," said Mr. Pontifex, flinging a dash of contempt into his voice; "how long have you known, pray, that he was at Dartmoor?"

As the solicitor put this question he drew himself together for one of those disconcerting pounces peculiar to him, and which always betokened the crisis of his diplomacy.

"Meddling fool," snarled Lewis Thorne; "why, for twelve months; ever since he ——"

"Ever since he set sail for the mine," whipped in the lawyer; "you are better informed than I imagined, Mr. Thorne. By the way," he lowered his tone to a whisper and approached Lewis Thorne with a single swift pace; "do you understand that the penalty for filing a false affidavit may be seven years' penal servitude? In order to commence your application to the Courts you had to swear that to the best of your knowledge and belief the Duke of Litherland was dead, and now, before witnesses, you have just admitted yourself guilty of perjury in making that statement. Beware!"

"Excuse me," said Captain Carruthers, as the solicitor stepped back to that officer's side; "but is it indiscreet to inquire if the Duke is really detained abroad by his mining interests?"

Hugo Pontifex nodded mysteriously. "His Grace," murmured the solicitor, "may be away for some years. But not a syllable to anyone, Captain Carruthers; I must not even tell you where the mine is. Mr. Thorne has only heard its name—oddly enough, it is called the 'Dartmoor.' There was some report of an accident to the Duke, that, no doubt, misled Mr. Thorne into his imprudent legal action, which, of course, he will pursue no further."

A sigh of relief fell on the lawyer's ear—Stella, Duchess of Litherland, had turned to the door in time to see the vanishing figure of Lewis Thorne.

* * * * *

And this is the explanation of the fact that, upon the discharge of James Traill, Number 1357, from a Devonshire convict establishment, that personage hastened to America, bought a costly copper mine, christened it the "Dartmoor," and returned to England as the clever and aristocratic mining expert, his Grace the Duke of Litherland.

But Captain Carruthers insisted upon dubbing his father-in-law the Duke of Dartmoor, to the amusement of Lady Adelaide Carruthers and the secret horror of the Duchess. As for Lewis Thorne, he uttered no opinion on the subject, the possibility of seven years for perjury being a most effective muzzle.

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GOOD SLATING.

"An enemy has done this," muttered Hamo Ibbetson looking up with a haggard face from the paper he was reading.

"What's the excitement, old cock?" elegantly inquired Freddie Mostyn, the barrister, stretching his long legs towards the studio fire, and turning a good-humoured, freckled face on his friend.

In answer the latter tossed him the paper, first indicating with his thumb an article headed "The Ibbetson Exhibition." The barrister took the crackling sheet and began to read, while Ibbetson with his chin on his fists, stared gloomily into the purring, snapping flames.

Hamo Ibbetson was one of those unhappy people who mistake intense love of an art for ability to excel in it. Full of enthusiasm and perseverance, but totally lacking in inspiration or executive skill, they will plod on doggedly and hopefully for a whole life-time, turning out with monotonous, pitiful regularity, the most woeful failures, and never advancing one step in their ill-chosen line.

In painting, in literature and in music these unfortunates are too pitifully abundant; and after a life of disappointment, they fall asleep murmuring that they have been misunderstood—neglected—unappreciated.

All the time they are totally oblivious of the fact that they never have produced—more, never will, and never can produce—one line, one brisk stroke, or one bar worth a moment's consideration. In one word, Ibbetson was a hopeless duffer.

With strong, native commonsense, old John Ibbetson, the millionaire brass founder of Birmingham, had strenuously fought against his son's infatuation for painting, until he at last resolved to (as he said) "let the young fool see he's no good at it."

To this end he consented to Hamo's abandoning the parental counting-house where he had been placed to gain an insight into "the business," and attending for several terms the magnificent Municipal School of Art.

Here, even the caustic criticisms of the foremost art teacher in England did not open the young man's eyes, and with hope and enthusiasm unabated, he went to Paris for a year and studied with Julien. He never realised that the master's grave "*Continuez, m'sieu'*," covered a sense of the helplessness of ever implanting any idea of drawing in the English pupil with the curly brown head and the earnest eyes.

An often expressed intention to cause some stir in art circles in England, resulted in a "one-man exhibition" in Bond Street, funds for the purpose being provided from Birmingham, when Ibbetson *père* watched the progress of events with humorous resignation.

The papers were not kind to the Ibbetson Exhibition, but if the big dailies chastised the ambitious young man with whips, the newly-started *Review of the Day* which had already made a name for vitriolic criticism employed scorpions.

"By Jove, old chap, what a savage sort of sportsman this writer-animal must be! Doesn't he pitch into you, though!" cried Freddie Mostyn, when he had come to the end of the article.

There was a look of pain in Ibbetson's dark eyes as he replied:

"It's simply a mean act of personal revenge! I must have unconsciously offended the man somehow, somewhere. Let's see, though," he picked up the paper again, "it's signed 'W.H.' but I don't seem to remember the initials. What an atrocious thing to do, though, anyhow! The other paper said I couldn't paint, but they didn't say it quite so brutally as this Johnnie. What shall I do about it?"

"Take no notice," said Mostyn, the cautious.

"What a cold-blooded animal you are!" cried the painter. "How can I sit still under an attack evidently made through personal malice. It's libellous, isn't it?" he added hopefully.

"Technically, all criticism is libellous," said the barrister, "but you couldn't get damages for that.

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Don't make yourself a laughing stock, old chap. Sit down and have another whisky-and-soda."

"I know what I will do!" said Ibbetson. "I'll give the cad the best thrashing he ever had in his unnatural life."

"Don't be an ass," said Mostyn placidly.

"It's all very well for you," cried his friend fiercely. "Nobody's trodden on your corns. Hang it, I can't sit here doing nothing. I'm off to Fleet Street."

He got up, and assumed hat and coat. He likewise took a serviceable walking-stick.

Mostyn viewed these preparations with visible uneasiness.

"Mark you, I'm not going to bail you out, you know," he observed, shaking a judicial forefinger at his fiery friend.

The latter merely laughed grimly, and in a few moments a swift hansom was speeding him Citywards.

* * * *

The more Hamo Ibbetson thought of the obnoxious criticism the angrier he got.

"Such a mean thing to do!" he kept repeating to himself complainingly, "such a very mean thing to do! I wouldn't do a thing like that—hang it!"

A grimy boy answered to his knock at the little window marked "Inquiries" when he had reached the office of the *Review of the Day*.

"Want to see the editor? Ain't in," observed this youth carelessly. "The assistant-editor's in, though."

"Then I'll see him," said Ibbetson, with determination.

"Where's yer card!" demanded the grimy one severely.

Ibbetson, abashed, produced the desired article. Presently the boy emerged from the editor's room, and remarked with condescension:

"Go in, will yer?" with a nod towards the inner apartment.

The room was apparently empty when Ibbetson entered it.

"I want to see the assistant-editor," said he, with a sense of the absurdity of thus addressing the empty air.

There arose from behind a big desk, the slight figure of a girl. She was attired neatly in black, with austere white collar and cuffs, and her sunny hair was severely dressed close to her small, high-bred head. She regarded Ibbetson gravely.

"Well?" she demanded.

"Are you the assistant-editor?" he stammered, hiding the serviceable walking stick behind him.

"Yes," said the girl, with a quiet smile. "I am the assistant-editor, *pro. tem.* What can I do for you?"

"I—er, rather wanted you to tell me," said the artist slowly, "the name of your art-critic."

"We never disclose the name of any one on our staff," said the girl.

"I want to know this for a particular reason."

"Your reasons don't matter to me," retorted the journalist. "Our rule is not to be broken."

"A very particular reason," persisted the young man.

"I can guess what it is," said the girl calmly. "You wish to remonstrate with him on the article in this week's number."

"A base and cowardly attack!" broke in Ibbetson hotly. "I can only imagine that the man has a grudge against me for some reason or other."

"Well, for once I'll break our rule," said she, with a flash of scorn in her eyes.

"The writer," remarked the girl, "had never seen you till—I mean, had never seen you when that criticism was done."

"Then what was the reason of the attack on myself?" demanded the artist.

"It wasn't an attack on yourself," declared his interlocutor. "It was a criticism of your work."

She was rather pale, but she regarded him steadily with clear grey eyes.

They were pretty eyes, he noticed, with long black lashes, that looked as if they could be very charming when the owner smiled. She was then very grave.

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"Be that as it may, I must know the writer's name," was Ibbetson's reply to the last remark.

"Well, for once, I'll break our rule," said she, with a flash of scorn in her grey eyes.

"Well?"

"I wrote it."

"You?"

There was a dead silence.

"And may I ask why?" he said slowly, "what had I ever done to you that you should attack me in this cruel—this atrocious fashion? Why do it?"

"It was an honest criticism," said the girl. "I had to say what I thought and felt. Mr. Ibbetson," she went on rapidly while her grey eyes searched his face, "there is a place in the world waiting for you which you can and ought to fill. You're breaking your father's heart by leaving it. Oh, yes, I know more about you than you think. We have mutual friends. Go back to your place and your own people. Take the place you are fitted for and leave painting to those who are fitted for it. Oh," she cried, breaking off suddenly, "how fearfully presumptuous of me to talk to you like this!"

"Go on," said the the artist eagerly.

"Will you do as I ask? Will you go back to your father and your own place in the world?" She looked very sweet as she bent forward with this question on her lips—her eyes, her cheeks all alight with excitement.

"I'll do it," cried Ibbetson impulsively. Five minutes later he was in a Fleet Street telegraph office dispatching a message.

It read as follows:

> Ibbetson, Copleston House, Hagley Road, Birmingham—Fatted calf for one. Arrive by 9.20 to-morrow. Hamo.

Then he went and dined, and the studio was not visited till quite late in the evening. The faithful Freddie was installed in his usual chair.

"Well, is the deed of blood done? There are no marks of combat on your manly face. E'en now your victim welters in his gore, perhaps?" said he.

"Don't talk rot, Freddie," laughed his friend.

"There's a letter for you on the mantelpiece," continued Freddie. "Came by special messenger. Gal's fist, too. What have you been up too, young fellow?"

The handwriting on the missive amiably pointed out by Mr. Mostyn was totally unknown to Ibbetson. He tore it open, and with a chill feeling about the heart read the following words:

> Dear Mr. Ibbetson,
>
> I do not know how to forgive myself and I dare not ask you to forgive me, for the foolish joke I played this afternoon. I did not really write the notice in the *Review of the Day* nor do I know who did it. I am only the Editor's amanuensis. But you looked so angry when you came in, and I wanted to save some poor man from coming into contact with that dreadful looking stick, so that I could not resist saying I wrote the notice, to see what you would do. You were so nice about it that I felt frightfully ashamed of myself afterwards; so I think you are entitled to an explanation and an apology.
>
> Yours faithfully,
> Winifred Hardy.

Ibbetson remained staring at this somewhat incoherent epistle with such a blank face that for the second time that day Mr. Mostyn was constrained to ask what the excitement was.

"Nothing," said Ibbetson with a harsh laugh, "only a very commonplace affair. I have been made a very complete fool of by a wheedling tongue and a pair of grey eyes—that's all."

He flung the letter savagely into the grate.

"You are an old humbug," quoth Mostyn softly, "but you must get up very early in the morning to deceive your old uncle Freddie. I saw you look carefully to see if there was any fire before you behaved so rudely to the young lady's letter."

Mr. Ibbetson did not go to Birmingham after all, the next day. He took to loitering in Fleet Street, and on several occasions was fortunate enough to encounter Miss Hardy. Doubtless his intention was to reprove her severely for the unlady-like trick she played him in the office of the *Review of the Day*. For the better administration of this rebuke they were wont to adjourn to a tea-shop in the vicinity of Ludgate Circus.

"I thought you were going back to Birmingham," remarked the lady-secretary, on one of these occasions.

"I will—if you'll come with me," he said quickly.

Of course it was not to be expected that she would say "Yes" all at once, but later on I have reason to believe she did.

VAUGHAN DRYDEN.

THE MOST HUMOUROUS BOOK OF RECENT TIMES.

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AT ALL BOOKSELLERS, BOOKSTALLS & LIBRARIES.

Love—The Master-Key.

ALTHOUGH not unfrequently quoted, a great number of people have been mistaken in the meaning of the title of Miss Florence Warden's book, "THE MASTER KEY," which has just been issued in sixpenny form. The purport of the story is to prove the old saying that "love is the *master-key* that opens every lock in the heart of man."

The story centres around a girl who is left a widow with an only son. The boy is the heir to large estates, and as is usual, in the event of his death the property will devolve upon the evil genius of the story. With the efforts he makes to secure possession of the prize that is almost within his grasp the plot is concerned, and the reader follows with close interest the tactics that the fond mother resorts to for the purpose of foiling the evil schemes that one by one are devised. Needless to say virtue is rewarded in the result, the plotter receives his due, and the story closes with the hero in full possession of his rights. The sensations in the story include revelations concerning a baby farmer, one or two attempted murders, and a kidnapping scheme. The romance is cleverly told, and lovers of light literature of the melodramatic type will revel in its pages.

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SHORT STORIES THAT MAKE YOU LAUGH

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, May 6th. Post-cards only, please. The prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. C. R. Fletcher, 53 Hagley Road, Edgbaston, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

"I'VE got a smart son at the Klondike goldfields."

"Gettin' rich fast, I s'pose?"

"Oh, yes; he writes that he'll soon have enough to get home with."

JINKS: "I don't know how you will feel about it, but the fact is my wife, your daughter, is a dreadful hard woman to live with."

Binks: "I can sympathize with you, sir; I married her mother."

---

*A POOR old Scotsman, who could no longer earn his own living, was obliged to accept the kindly proffered hospitality of some English friends.

On the day of his arrival, they, thinking he would enjoy it, procured some watercress, which was added to the things already on the table. The poor man, accustomed all his life to fare of the plainest description, hesitated to partake of such a decided novelty as cress, and only the fear of hurting the feelings of his friends could induce him to make the effort.

In a short time they noticed that tears were coursing down the old man's cheeks, and inquiry elicited this reply:

"I'm thinking what ma puir mither would say 'gin she could see her son eating grass like a coo."

NOT long ago, in a police-court in Melbourne, a Chinaman was summoned for being in a tenement unfit for human habitation.

The case was clearly proved, and he was fined £1. But in no way could John be made to understand that a fine had been inflicted.

He sat there with unmoved stolidity, and all the court could get from him was:

"Me no savey (know), no savey."

Here rose a well-known lawyer.

"With your worship's permission," he said, "I think I can make the Chinaman understand."

He was permitted to try.

Striding up to the Celestial he said:

"John, you are fined two pounds."

"No fear, only one."

HEWITT: "The girl in the print dress is a poem."

Jewett: "She differs from most poems."

Hewitt: "How's that?"

Jewett: "Most poems don't get into print."

LAST Christmas a young couple, evidently from the country, entered a studio to have their "likeness took."

The operator proceeded to arrange his sitters, though he noticed a look of growing dissatisfaction on the young man's face. He was, however, turning to his camera when he was recalled by the amusing request:

"Hi! mister! Not so close!" Then, with a confidential jerk, "We're only brother and sister, you know."

A CERTAIN famous comedian had long dealt with a tradesman named Berry, who, on one occasion, was a little premature in sending in his account.

The actor called on him, and thus eased his mind:

"I say, here's a pretty *mull*, Berry; you have sent in you *bill*, Berry, before it is *due*, Berry. Your father, the *elder* Berry, would not have been such a *goose*, Berry; but you need not look *black*, Berry, for I don't care a *straw*, Berry; and I shan't pay you till *Christmas*, Berry!"

"DEAR me," he whispered, "do you think if I married you your father would ever forgive us?"

"I'm sure he would, dear," she asserted softly.

"And would he give us a house of our own?"

"I know he would, dearest."

"And would he give us enough to live beautifully on?"

"I'm sure of it, Harry."

"And would he take me into the firm?"

"Certainly he would."

"And let me run the business to suit myself?"

"Of course he wou'd ,darling."

She snuggled to his bosom, but he put her aside coldly.

"Well, I'm afraid I can never marry you, dearest," he said hoarsely. "Your father is altogether too willing to get you off his hands."

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SHE: "If I should die you would never get another wife who would look after you as I have done."

He: "No; not if I could help it."

MYER: "I wonder what causes concussion of the brain?"

Ryder: "A collision between two trains of thought, I suppose."

THE old, old subject of the supremacy of each sex was being discussed by a man and a young woman. As a final "clincher" the young man said, "There's one thing, at any rate—you never hear of a man wishing he was a woman."

"Of course not!" she retorted. "It might be his fate to marry a man."

"I AM sensible of the honour you do me, Mr. Mitchell. in the proposal of marriage you have just made," said the young lady, with a slight curl of the lip, "but circumstances over which I have no control compel me to decline the honour."

"What are those circumstances?" demanded the young man.

"Your circumstances, Mr. Mitchell."

HERE is an instance of Governmental red tape.

The gentleman who was requested to alter his item of fourpence for porter to "porterage," on a subsequent occasion sent in an account for:

"Cabbage, one shilling."

The authorities politely informed him that they could not acknowledge the account. He must pay for his own vegetarian refreshment. However, they were left speechless when their humble servant explained that "cabbage" referred to cab-hire.

ON a cold, frosty day a crowd of people, among whom were two or three policemen, were congregating together, watching a farrier roughing a horse, when up came a little urchin about eight or nine years of age, thinking there was something the matter.

He elbowed his way through the crowd, when he met a companion about the same age, and said to him:

"What's the matter here, Bill?"

"Matter?" reiterated the other scornfully. "There's nothing the matter, or else there wouldn't be any coppers about!"

The men in blue joined heartily in the burst of laughter that followed.

JUST after the Forth Bridge had been opened, Queen Victoria expressed a wish to see it on one of her journeys to Balmoral. Her Majesty's desire was gratified.

The train drew up at Dalmeny, the nearest station on the south side, and Lord Rosebery, whose estate borders the Forth at this point, was in attendance to show and explain everything.

When the Queen resumed her northward journey, Lord Rosebery went back to Dalmeny House.

On his way he met his head gardener and told him the Queen had been graciously pleased to accept the grapes that his lordship had taken to Her Majesty.

"That's a'richt, ma loard," replied the gardener, "but did she no' say anything aboot returnin' the basket?"

"THAT horrid Maud has been gossiping about me."

"Why, how do you know?"

"She kissed me twice when we met to-day."

TEACHER (taking the class in English history): "Now, William Johnson, what happened on the fifth of November?"

William (readily): "Please, sir, our Henry got his eye blown out, and dad singed off all his whiskers."

"DEAR me, that was terrible. Man fell overboard in mid-ocean the other day, and never was seen again?" said Hicks.

"Drowned?" asked Mrs. Hicks hysterically.

"Oh, no! of course not." said Hicks irritably. "Sprained his ankle, probably!"

"WHAT are you doing?" said the clerk in the hotel. "Do you wish to stifle yourself and die on our hands?"

"What's the matter with you?"

"You've gone and blown out the gas."

"Nothing of the kind. I'm entitled to the use of this gas, aren't I?"

"Yes."

"Well, I can't get any satisfaction by lighting it. The only way I can get my money's worth is to sit here and smell it."

"MISS GLADYS," said old Moneybags, "if my suit is not agreeable to you, say so frankly; but do not, I beg of you, tell me that old, old story that you will always look upon me as a brother."

"Sir," replied the lovely young maiden as her eye lit up with the deathless flame of a pure young heart's devotion, or, as another puts it, with the sincerity of a smile on the lip, but a tear in the eye, "I do not love you well enough for a brother, but I have no objection to take you as a husband."

AN American correspondent gives the following as an example of the rigid formality with which the officials in some parts of Russia act:

Russian Official: "You can't stay in this country, sir."

Traveller: "Then I'll leave it."

Official: "Have you a permit to leave it?"

Traveller: "No, sir."

Official: "Then you cannot go. I give you twenty-four hours to make up your mind as to what you shall do."

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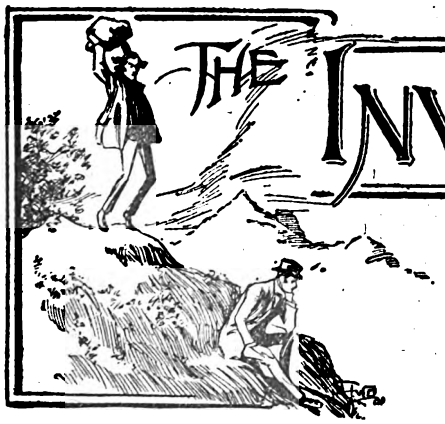

THE INVISIBLE EYE.

By J. L. Hornibrook.

WHEN I caught sight of my old friend Dick Davenport that morning, he was slouching along with his hands behind his back, his chin on his breast, and his brows puckered into a frown. By all of which tokens I knew there was a bit of grit in the machinery somewhere, if I may so express it, for as a general rule life ran as smoothly and pleasantly with him as anyone could wish.

So deep was his preoccupation, I verily believe he would have passed me without a sign of recognition, if I had not planted myself right in his way and compelled him to p ll up.

His face cleared the instant he became aware of my presence, for he had the rare knack of thrusting his own concerns into the background—no mat er how pressing they might be at the moment—when he encountered a friend, and giving himself up heart and soul to the pleasure which the meeting afforded him.

But on this occasion I had no intention of letting him escape an explanation so easily.

"Now, Dick," I said, when our greetings were over, taking him by the arm in a confidential manner. "Where lies the trouble? Out with it, my friend. Unburden yourself."

"Oh, it's the old story," he sighed, dolefully enough.

"What!" I exclaimed. "Not debts, surely? You haven't been launching out into a career of extravagance, have you? You, of all men."

"Oh, no," he anawered. "It's nothing of that kind."

"What is it, then?"

"Well," he said, with a conscious look, and colouring a little, "I was down in Wales lately, and—and——"

"You lost your heart there, I suppose?"

His silence showed that I had not gone very wide of the mark this time.

"And who is the fair enchantress, if I may be permitted to ask?" I said, seeing that he was likely to remain tongue-tied on this point.

He showed unmistakable symptoms of going into raptures on the spot.

"One of the dearest——" he poured forth.

"Granted—all granted!" I hastened to interpose. "It is understood that she is an angel, of course; but what I want to come at is, the name by which your divinity is known here on earth."

If I had let him run on as he had begun, there is no knowing where he might have stopped; but when I tried to pin him down to hard facts, it was with the greatest difficulty I could extract any information from him. I had to drag it out of him bit by bit, and when it was all laid bare I found it was indeed the old, old story, without even the charm of novelty in its details.

It appears that he had been spending a week or two in Wales, where he had met his fate in the shape of a certain Miss Carrie Vaughan, the youngest of her family, who lived at a place called—called—well, I don't think I will attempt the name. The singular part of it was, that he remembered having heard his mother often speak of the Vaughans, though it was so long ago he had utterly forgotten in what connection. His introduction to the family, however, had been quite a casual one, brought about by a slight mishap which befell him on the Welsh hills.

Having exchanged vows of undying affection with Miss Carrie, he hurried back to town to make known the the state of affairs to his uncle, Sir Denham Faulkner. This uncle—his mother's brother—had been god-father, guardian, and general benefactor to him all rolled into one. A good type of the old school, courteous, affable, whole-hearted, his nephew's welfare was the one thing he looked to most, and there was nothing in reason which he denied him.

Sir Denham, in a general way, was one of the most even tempered of men, by no means easily ruffled. You may imagine my friend's surprise, then, when, at the very mention of the name of Vaughan, he started bolt upright in his chair, and glared at his astonished nephew in a way that brought him to a dead stop. It was some little time before the baronet seemed to take the thing in, and then—well, he let himself go.

He strictly forbade Davenport to hold any further communication with the family, or even to mention the name again in his presence, on pain of his severest displeasure.

Upon that, he dismissed the subject once and for all, assigning no reason whatever for his extraordinary outburst.

"It came upon me like a cold water shock," Davenport went on to explain, "for the thought of encountering any opposition never entered my head. But whatever may be the cause of it, there it is; an insuperable barrier as far as I can see. Of course, after all he has done for me, I could not run counter to his wishes, or repay him by open desertion. And yet——"

He broke off with a sigh, and his gaze wandered past me in a dreamy, visionary kind of way, as if a certain scene in distant Wales was rising before him. I confess that I felt sorry for him, for he was manifestly hard hit, and inclined to take his uncle's strictures very much to heart.

At the present moment love and duty were tugging

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and straining at him, each pulling in opposite directions; about as bad a plight as a man could well be in.

"Look here," I said, after turning the matter over in my mind, "I am going down to Wales myself in a week or so on business of my own. Give me the Vaughan's address and I'll look them up. I will introduce myself, of course, as a friend of yours, and by a little gentle probing I may possibly succeed in getting at the root of this matter. From whatever cause Sir Denham's hostility has sprung, you may depend it is known to some at least on the opposite side."

He scribbled the name of the place on the back of his card—a jumble of all the consonants of the alphabet, it looked like, with a vowel or two thrown in—and went on his way in the same state of gloomy depression.

* * * * *

As it so happened, something cropped up in the next few days which caused me to postpone my departure to Wales for a week or two longer. My object in going there was to conduct a series of experiments in kite-photography, a favourite hobby of mine, and one to which I have devoted years of study.

When I got away at last, Davenport's matter was still fresh in my mind, and I determined to sift it thoroughly. As it was immaterial to me what neighbourhood I selected, I fixed my headquarters at a small town within two or three miles of the Vaughans' place, so as to be close at hand, and took an early opportunity of calling upon the family.

It consisted, I found, of Mrs. Vaughan and her three daughters; the father, David Vaughan, having been dead a number of years. The moment I set foot inside the house, a large and rather gloomy country mansion, with a vista of hills in the distance, I felt somehow as if I breathed the atmosphere of mystery, of secret trouble.

Mrs Vaughan, who received me in a very friendly manner, was evidently of a strangely timid, nervous disposition, with a peculiar sadness of expression, and a certain look in her eyes which told of some great shock in the past. From the very first she gave me the impression that there had been a dark tragedy in her life. And the shadow of that tragedy was over the house still. There was a skeleton in the cupboard somewhere of that I felt convinced.

Of the daughters, Miss Carrie was undoubtedly the most attractive in every way; a tender, winsome little thing, upon whom a harsh word would have much the same effect as a chill breath upon a delicate hot-house flower.

From the moment she heard that I was a friend of Davenport's, I could see that she was on hot irons to get me aside and question me concerning him. As I had no wish to keep her in suspense, I soon contrived to give her the opportunity, and then out came the questions in a stream. What had happened to him? Why did he not write? Was he coming back soon, or—or—was he ill?

I endeavoured to soothe her as best I could, said that his silence was due to circumstances over which he had no control, and that he was much distressed at not being able to write. I expressed my belief that all would come right in good time, and begged her meanwhile to keep up a brave heart. Then, in order to avoid becoming entangled in more explicit explanations, I beat a somewhat hasty retreat, having done very little in the way of probing so far.

The short winter's day was shading away rapidly into night as I left the house, and as I had a good long walk before me I set out at a brisk pace.

I had almost reached the gate leading on to the road when it opened suddenly, and a man entered whose appearance, as well as a certain strangeness of manner, struck me as being remarkably odd.

A tall, spare, rugged figure, with that slight stoop which comes of incessant hill-climbing, the stranger appeared to be a man well on in years, but hard, sinewy, active—all bone and muscle, in fact. He was dressed in a rough suit of home-spun, and carried a long stick—something like an Alpine-stock—in his hand, which he grasped in a most aggressive manner the moment he caught sight of me.

Instead of passing by in the ordinary way, he sheered off on to the grass and swept round in a semicircle, keeping his wild eyes fixed upon me, however, the whole time. And in those eyes, gleaming from under the thick thatch of his knitted brows, there was such a strange, fierce, uncanny sort of look that I experienced a most uncomfortable, awesome kind of thrill, and was not a little thankful to get the gate between us.

Glancing back I saw this singular-looking being march straight up to the house, and then caught the soft glow of light as the door was opened. In he stalked as if he were quite at home there, the door closed upon him, and I was left standing at the gate with a misty conception of having accidentally got a peep at the family skeleton.

As I turned away, my eye rested upon an intelligent-looking young fellow who had halted in the middle of the road, evidently to observe the stranger, and who glanced across at me with a curious sort of half-smile.

"Can you tell me who that was?" I asked, approaching him.

"That!" he said, as if astonished at my ignorance. "Why, Mad Morgan, of course."

"Mad Morgan!" I exclaimed. "And who is he?"

"Morgan Vaughan is his proper name, but they always call him Mad Morgan around here," was his reply. "A little touched in the upper storey, you know," he went on, tapping his forehead. "Spends his days mostly in roaming about the hills, and an odd night or two as well."

"Is he any relation of the Mr. Vaughan who used to own this place?" I asked.

"Brother," he answered, and went on his way.

This information started a train of thoughts which occupied me deeply as I trudged back to my hotel, and I wondered if I had here the key to the mystery which so perplexed poor Davenport.

But though I turned and twisted it in every conceivable manner, I could make nothing of it so far, and had to give the thing up for the time being.

Early next morning I started off with my kite and photographic apparatus, intending to put in a good long day among the hills. I had retained the services of a couple of sturdy rustics to lend a hand with the flying-line, for the kites pulling power was enough to lift a single man off his feet.

For the benefit of the uninitiated, let me just say that it is possible now-a-days to take a complete view—or rather series of views—of the surrounding country by the method I was about to adopt, and that from a considerable altitude. The camera, specially constructed for this purpose, is suspended below the kite, in such a position that it commands the scene beneath. Before the lens a small but powerful telescope is placed so as

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to throw a clearer reflection on to the plate. The exposure is regulated by clockwork, and the apparatus is capable of taking a dozen photographs while suspended in mid-air.

Hitherto my experiments had been confined to fairly level ground, but I was anxious to try my hand in a broken and mountainous district, where the scene would afford greater variety. For this reason I selected a spot on the western side of a hill called Craigowen, and from there we sent the kite up. Caught by a light breath of wind it sailed gracefully across the crest of the hill, until it hung suspended over the western side. I was glad of this, for it meant that I would obtain views of an area which was not visible to me at the time.

I expressed my belief that all would come right in good time.

The whole operation, including the hauling down of the heavy kite, takes a good slice out of the day, especially at a time of year when the sun sets early. Indeed, the afternoon was well advanced when I got the apparatus back to earth again, and started to pack up.

I was busily engaged upon this task when I heard a distant shout behind me. Glancing round, I saw a lad from the hotel tearing towards the spot at top speed, holding out something in his hand which looked like a letter.

Wondering what it could be about, I rose from my knees and started off to meet the messenger. As he rushed up breathlessly, and I took the note from him, I saw that the envelope simply bore my name, scribbled in the utmost haste apparently. Tearing it open, I found inside a sheet of notepaper, which contained this startling message:

> For Heaven's sake, come back at once. Something awful has happened.
>
> Davenport.

Davenport in Wales? I could scarcely credit it. When I parted from him in town, it was on the distinct understanding that he would make no move in the matter until he heard from me. A sudden fear gripped me that he had been foolish enough to break out into open defiance of his uncle, which had led to some alarming and totally unexpected development.

I rushed off at once, leaving word for my attendants to follow at their leisure, and reached the hotel quite out of breath. There I found everything in a state of dire confusion. The scared, almost horrified expression in every face told the same tale—something awful had happened! Nor did I remain long in doubt as to what it was, for I suddenly caught one word which explained it all—"murder!"

The landlord, who was anxiously on the lookout for me, took me aside at once, and from him I learnt particulars of the tragedy. Utterly unprepared as I was for anything of the kind, his account shocked me beyond measure.

Mr. Davenport, he said, had arrived at the hotel soon after I had set out that morning, to be followed in hot haste by his uncle, Sir Denham Faulkner. The latter went straight to his nephew's room, where judging by their raised and heated tones, a stormy scene ensued. For some time their voices were heard as if in high dispute, and then Sir Denham walked straight out of the place, evidently hurt and offended. A minute or so later the nephew ran out after him, caught him up and the dispute appeared to be renewed. They disappeared together along a path leading to the hills.

After the lapse of an hour or two the nephew returned alone, went straight to his room, and locked himself in. And then, later on, they were horrified to learn that the dead body of Sir Denham Faulkner had been found among the hills, his skull crushed in by a piece of rock which had been flung down upon him from the top of a bank upon which he was evidently resting at the time.

"And your blundering country police have gone and arrested the nephew, I suppose?" I broke in.

"They have, sir," he admitted. "Before he was removed to the police-station he scribbled a line to you, which I undertook should be placed in your hands without a moment's delay."

I waited to hear no more. Off I rushed to the police-station, and there I found poor Davenport, utterly overwhelmed and crushed by this terrible calamity.

It was not his own position, bad as it was, which weighed upon him. He scarcely seemed to give a thought to that. It was grief for the untimely fate of his uncle which bowed him down so. Above all, the sting of remorse was at him, and he bitterly bemoaned

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the fact that they had parted in coldness, if not in anger.

In answer to my questions he had little further information to impart. He stated that, consumed with impatience at not hearing from me, he had risked a flying visit to Wales himself. His uncle must have discovered his purpose in some way, however, for he followed by the very next train and caught him up at the hotel.

He frankly admitted that angry words had passed between them, for something Sir Denham had said unfortunately stung him into a hasty retort. But the moment his uncle's back was turned he bitterly repented having given way to this momentary display of temper, and ran after him to beg his forgiveness.

The baronet, however, received him coldly, and remained deaf to all his intreaties.

They parted some distance outside the town, and having wandered about for upwards of an hour in great distress of mind, Davenport made his way back to the hotel.

"And Sir Denham went on alone?" I said.

"He did."

"Which direction did he take?"

"He kept straight on towards the hills."

"Where was the body found?"

"At the foot of Craigowen."

I fairly bounded to my feet.

"On which side?" I cried, scarcely able to control myself. "Tell me on which side?"

"On the western side, I believe."

"And at what hour do you suppose he would have reached that spot?"

"About noon."

That was enough! I was off like a shot, tearing back to the hotel in breathless haste. At noon my kite was sailing high over Craigowen, an invisible eye was looking down upon the western side of that hill, taking silent note of all that transpired beneath, and recording it in a manner there was no disputing.

My two rustics had just returned when I reached the door of the hotel. I pounced upon the photograph apparatus, took it straight to my room, and locked myself in.

Far into that night I toiled over my negatives, developing one after another, with feverish eagerness. Views! Nothing but barren views! Not a single human form to be seen anywhere!

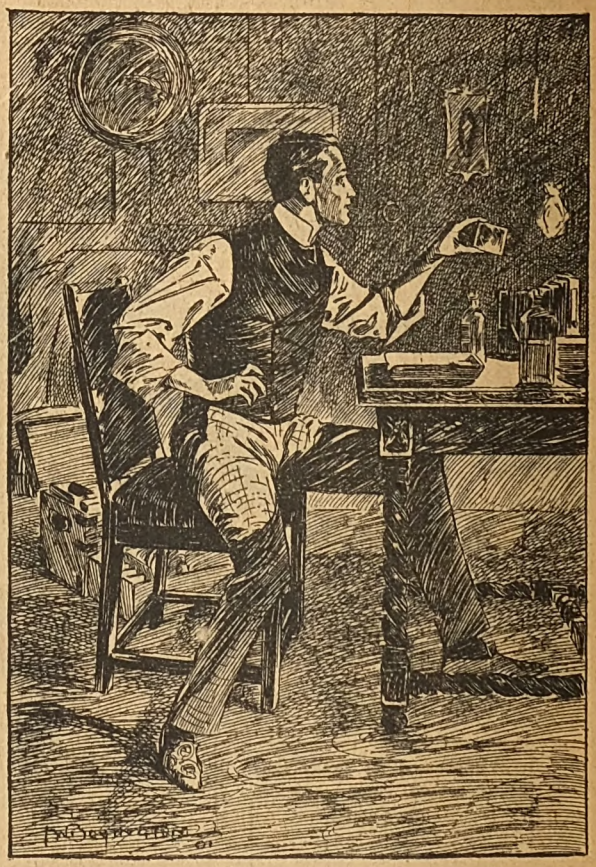
But stay; what was this? What were those two faint shadows which were beginning to loom from the plate now before me. I held my breath; my hand shook. Clearer and clearer those indistinct blotches grew; and then—yes!—I recognised that figure seated on the shelving bank, with his chin on his hand. It was none other than Sir Denham Faulkner.

Behind him, on top of the bank, a piece of rock held high above his head in both hands, as if in the very act of hurling it down upon the unconscious figure beneath, was a man; a wild, uncouth, savage-looking being, about whom there seemed to be something strangely familiar. Good Heavens! I recognised that strange form now! It was Morgan Vaughan—Mad Morgan, as I had heard him called.

* * * * *

Needless to say, I was in a position next day to make Davenport's innocence abundantly clear, even to the intelligence of the country police. They had the grace to admit their blunder on the spot, and set out at once to arrest the real author of the crime, Morgan Vaughan, but only secured him after a prolonged and desperate struggle.

Nor was the murder, as might be supposed, a mere wanton one, the outcome of a sudden access of mania. There was a deep motive for it. It subsequently transpired that there had been a feud between the two men, arising out of an affair in which Morgan's brother, David Vaughan, was also concerned. It seems that a number of years ago, before Sir Denham had succeeded to the title or estates, and when there appeared little likelihood of their ever coming his way, he was on a walking tour



But stay; what was this? What were those two faint shadows which were beginning to loom from the plate before me.

through Wales. Being poor enough in those days he had little more, in the shape of worldly goods, than his knapsack and the clothes he stood in.

By chance—an unlucky chance for him as it proved—he fell in with a younger sister of the two Vaughans, a very beautiful girl, which resulted in a clandestine love affair. They met frequently, but always in secret, for the brothers were inordinately proud, and, besides, designed their sister for a wealthy, middle-aged baronet, a neighbour of theirs.

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In some way it came to their ears that she was in the habit of meeting a stranger, who was touring the country on foot. The discovery rendered them furious. They laid in wait for the lovers, surprised them at one of their stolen meetings, and attacked young Faulkner in such a brutal manner that they left him for dead on the ground. The sister they dragged home, where they shut her up in one of the top rooms of the house.

Their cruel treatment, added to the shock of having seen her lover murdered, as she thought, before her very eyes, preyed upon her mind to such an extent that she lost her reason. Death released her from her sufferings soon afterwards; but with her last breath, with all the strength that remained to her, she called down vengeance upon both the brothers.

Nor was the vengeance long delayed. Within twelve months David Vaughan met with a shocking death upon the mountains, leaving a widow and three young children to mourn his loss. Morgan lived, but the double tragedy wrought so upon his mind that he became little better than a maniac. He died in a Criminal Lunatic Asylum.

It was generally supposed that he had caught sight of Sir Denham on that fatal day, recognised his old enemy, and followed him until an opportunity presented itself of taking him unawares.

For the rest, when Davenport was united to the youngest of the three sisters, the feud was closed for ever. And though their future happiness was not exactly clouded by the knowledge of the foregoing facts, yet I fancy it was of a more subdued nature than might have been the case otherwise.

SHE: "What do you want me to hold the tacks for Claude?"

He: "So that I won't be laid up with a smashed thumb."

SHE: "I wonder what makes Funniman hesitate so in his speech this evening?"

He: "Well, you see, the jokes he has to utter are such old friends that he doesn't like to part with them."

GEORGE: "I see nothing for us but to elope. Do you think your father would forgive us?"

Ethel: "I am sure he would."

George: "How can you be so sure?"

Ethel: "I felt a little nervous on that score, and—and I asked him."

EVERY man should always write as plainly as he can.

Once upon a time a young man wrote to a girl: "Your loveliness has inspired me to ask you to become my wife," and she read it "loneliness," and got so indignant that she refused him by return of post.

"EVER quarrel with your wife?"

"No."

"Have any trouble with servants?"

"No."

"Children worry you?"

"No."

"Great Cæsar, man, how's that?"

"Ain't married, and live by myself."

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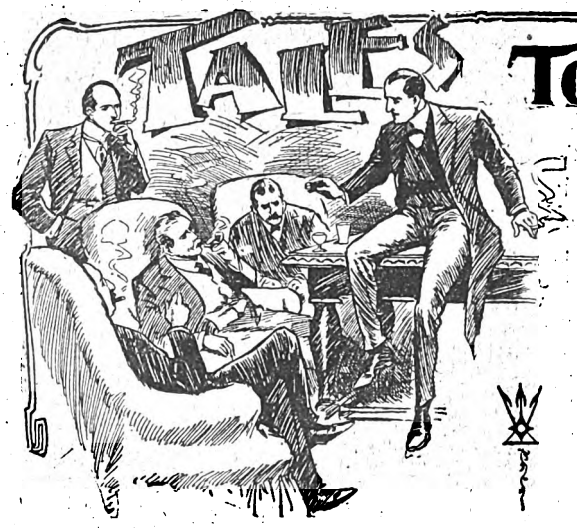

TOLD "OFF DUTY."

[You probably don't know the "Stand-Easy" Club. It isn't in the directory, and you might live next door to the place for years without knowing of its existence by that name. It isn't a conventional club; there is no subscription, and there is no register of members. It is merely a room in a quiet, orderly, and select hostelry in Westminster, where, by common consent, a number of officials of all kinds meet when "off duty." There you may find detectives from Scotland Yard, near by; firemen, commissionaires, a soldier or two, and maybe a doctor from St. Thomas' Hospital or elsewhere. A motley crowd they would be if they wore their uniforms, but at the "Stand-Easy" uniforms are a rarity, "mufti" being the unwritten rule. The result is a gathering of quiet, well-behaved, and well-dressed men. Saturday night is the time when one sees the biggest muster, for then it is the custom for one member to regale the company with a story, the story being, as a rule, an account of some incident in the teller's own career.]

Gregory Wagstaff: South African Millionaire.

Told by the EX-WARDER.

"No doubt most of you present," said the tall and somewhat stout man with mutton-chop whiskers, who sat in the corner, "know that before I became butler to Sir Ethelbert Tracy, I was a warder at Portland for many years. Now, the story I am going to tell is, strangely enough, not connected so much with my career as warder as with my service at Sir Ethelbert's. Yet, but for my having been employed in the former capacity, the story might well have had a different ending from what it did.

"Sir Ethelbert Tracy, I may tell you, although a landed proprietor, was by no means a wealthy man as wealth is reckoned nowadays. He had a big estate and position to keep up, while all the time his rent-roll showed a considerable annual decrease. Now, Sir Ethelbert had a daughter, a beautiful girl of about twenty. Madge was her name, and a better-liked young mistress among servants it would have been difficult to find. All of us, from myself and her own maid down to the page-boy and scullery-maid, would have done her any service, for we worshipped the very ground she walked on. And talking of this kind of dog-worship reminds me that, at the time of which I speak, Miss Madge was simply adored by a young London gentleman, a certain Gerald Waine, who was a-studying at the Bar. Miss Madge, in her turn, loved him as much as he loved her, though, of course, as is the way with young ladies, she didn't show it same as he did.

"Unfortunately, young Mr. Waine was poor. This studying at the Bar didn't seem at that time a very paying sort of game, and Sir Ethelbert, when his consent to their engagement was asked, wouldn't hear of it. It seems that he had other intentions regarding the marriage of his daughter; and the fact was he wanted her to marry money and a lot of it.

"So the two young folks had to leave off seeing one another; but, as the old saying is, absence makes the heart grow fonder, and Miss Madge and Mr Gerald didn't stop loving each other just because they happened to be separated.

"Soon after this, Sir Ethelbert went to London—to his house in Belgravia, leaving me in charge of his country residence. In London he made the acquaintance of a certain Mr. Gregory Wagstaff, a man of about forty, and worth well-nigh as many millions of money. At least, such was the rumour that reached us. And it seemed true enough, too, for the papers were full of news about him just then, and stated how Gregory Wagstaff, having emigrated to South Africa some years before as a penniless young man, had stumbled over a nugget or a gold mine, and had now returned to his native land a millionaire.

"Well, the next thing we hears about Mr. Wagstaff was, that he and Miss Madge had become engaged. I, for one, couldn't understand it, for the young lady had doted on Gerald Waine but a little time before. However, the fact remained, she was engaged, and the engagement was announced in all the fashionable papers.

"For the next few weeks, I learnt nothing further; but at length Sir Ethelbert arranged to give a grand dinner-party at his London house, in honour of the engaged couple. As it was to be a very swell affair, all available aid was pressed into service, and, among others I was sent for.

"The night of the party arrived, and the guests began thronging to Sir Ethelbert's house. Dinner began. Mr. Gregory Wagstaff, I was given to understand, was the gentleman sitting alongside my master. He was tall, rather stout, of ruddy complexion, and had a pair of whiskers that looked something like Dundreary's, cut off suddenly at a level with the jawbone.

"But what struck me as most curious was, that I seemed somehow to remember his face. As I handed him some wine, he happened to raise his eyes, and it was then that a sudden thought flashed through my brain that I had seen those eyes before. But where, I couldn't for the life of me recall. Nor could I, although I kept on the look-out for another straight glance at my gentleman. And so the dinner passed off without anything happening.

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"It was a day or two after this that I had a long walk with Emma, Miss Madge's own maid. I was rather sweet on Emma at the time, and was trying to pluck up courage to ask her to take me for better or for worse.

"And as we walked that afternoon under the trees in Kensington Gardens, I suddenly blurted the question out.

"What did Emma reply? Neither 'yes' nor 'no.' She liked me well enough, she said, and she was willing to marry me provided I would do her a favour.

"'What is it, my dear?' I asked, 'I'm willing to do any mortal thing a man can do.'

"At that, Emma replied that she was much concerned about her young mistress. Miss Madge had confessed to her that she was very unhappy; that, while she loved Gerald Waine with all her heart, her father had made her engage herself to the African millionaire. She hated this man Wagstaff, and distrusted him in the bargain.

"'Well, what can I do, Emma dear?' I asked, when my sweetheart had told me all this.

"'Can't you stop the wedding in some way?'

"'Stop the wedding! Me—Sir Ethelbert's butler—stop the wedding which he himself has arranged! Good gracious me!'

"'Well, if you don't, William,' Emma replies, 'all is over between us.'

"'But be reasonable, my dear,' I says. 'Ask me to do anything in reason, and see how ready I'll be to do it.'

"'I want you to do nothing else but this. If Miss Madge marries this man, she will be wretched for life. She told me herself she distrusts him, and that she'd just as soon marry a convict.'

"I stopped dead-still at the word. My heart almost came into my throat, and I felt my brain a-throbbing. Then something seemed to go pop inside, and I jumped a yard in the air.

"'Emma!' I shouts in my excitement, 'Emma, I'll do it—I'll stop this wedding!'

"'You will, William,' answers Emma. 'I thought you would. You're the dearest duck of an old darling as ever was.'

"And with that she gives me such a kiss as I shall live in memory of to my dying day.

"Now, perhaps you're all a-wondering what it was that made me suddenly change round, and speak so confidently about stopping the wedding.

"Well, the truth is, that when that something went pop in my noddle, I remembered where I'd previously seen the face of Mr. Gregory Wagstaff.

"That don't seem a very important discovery, do it? But it was, as you shall presently hear.

"My first business, when I was free the next day was to seek out Mr. Gerald Waine. He lives somewhere in the Temple, and, after a little trouble, I found him. I told him who I was, and spoke of Miss Madge's reluctance to marry the millionaire, and my promise to Emma to stop the marriage coming off.

"'But how is that to be done, Watkins?' gloomily asked the young chap. 'Heaven knows I'd give anything to stop the affair, but it seems to me there's no possible way of doing this.'

"'I don't know so much about that, sir,' said I. 'Supposing we could prove that this Mr. Wagstaff's past life hadn't been everything it should be, what then?'

"'His past life, Watkins! What do you mean?'

"'I'll tell you, sir,' I replied. 'The case is this. Directly I set eyes on Mr. Gregory Wagstaff, I felt sure I'd met him before, but couldn't recollect when or where. Since then, however, I've remembered. I met him first, sir, in Portland Prison!'

"'Portland Prison?'

"'Yes, sir, I was a warder, and he was a convict!'

"'Are you sure?' he asked in astonishment.

"'Positive! Gregory Wagstaff ain't his name, sir. His real name's Daniel Rook, alias Shooter, alias The Scorpion. He was one of the smartest coiners of the day, and did five years' penal for it in my time.'

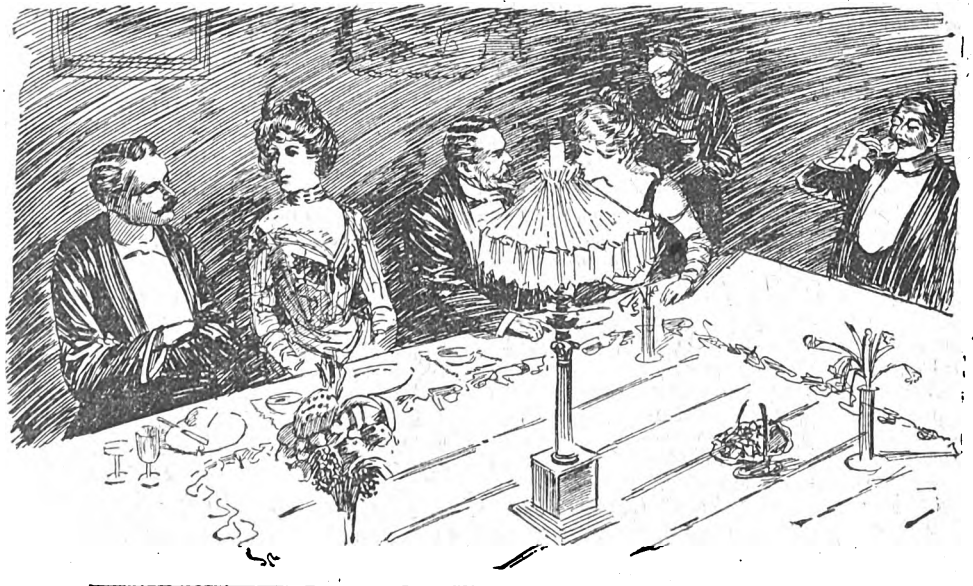
"'Whew!' whistled the young barrister, 'this is a revelation, Watkins. Mr. Gregory Wagstaff must certainly be looked after. I'll get a detective to look up his past history fully.'

* * * * *

"Gerald Waine did put a detective on the scent, and a smart one too. In the course of a week or so, he found out all sorts of things.

"It appeared that not only had Gregory Wagstaff been a coiner, but, under the guise of a millionaire, he was still running a coining establishment on a huge scale on the banks of the Thames down Sunbury way.

"To cut a long story short, the bogus millionaire was arrested three days before that fixed for the wedding. Within a year Gerald Waine married Miss Madge, and, not long afterwards, your humble servant had the pleasure of leading Emma Perkins to the altar."



A sudden thought flashed through my brain that I had seen those eyes before.

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The Recovered Estate.

Lescombe Hall, the property of Lescombe Lescombe Esquire, was a property of its kind exceedingly pleasant and attractive.

It was situated on a promontory, in one of our south-western counties, which stretched somewhat broadly into the sea, terminating in a point, on which were situated the picturesque ruins of an ancient chapel, which, in the days of faith, pious fishermen had erected to their patron saint.

The house itself was sheltered from the sea breeze by low-lying hills; it was well-nigh covered with ivy; an ancient colony of rooks had built for generations in the tall trees; a pretty cottage, instead of the modern kind of edifice, served as a lodge to the park-like grounds; and all the land within the promontory, strictly so called, formed the Home Farm.

Other land there was outlying the Home Farm, where labourer's cottages, the best in the whole county, lay, nestled each in its own holding—a veritable model village, although it did not arrogate to itself that title, as the manner of some pharisaical villages is.

Beyond this the Lescombe estates did not go, although a few generations back they extended over twelve thousand acres, which were now broken up into farms and holdings and lesser estates.

But the owner of the Hall was the lord of the manor; and whether by courtesy or right, he had the shooting over the whole of the original estate. But the present story is not concerned, as so many stories are, with ancestral acres and ancestral hall. It is rather concerned with Egyptian bonds and Turkish securities.

The father of our present Mr. Lescombe was a man who had done a great deal of prosperous business in the money-marts. Just as he had made a competent fortune he found that the hall, manor, village, and advowson of Lescombe, with divers rights of fishing and shooting, were in the market. It was a curious coincidence that the name of this property should be the same as his own name. It took the old man's fancy hugely that he should be Lescombe of Lescombe.

The former people who had it were of another name, probably derived from another property. But to any man of the name of Lescombe who should buy Lescombe there would be an ancestral hall, not to mention ancestors, all ready provided. So when the great estate was parcelled out and broken up, the Hall and the Home Farm and some out-lying lands were sold to Mr. Lescombe, who was formerly of the Stock Exchange, but who now became Lescombe of Lescombe.

He had a son born to him in this country abode, and, still further to strengthen the idea of territoriality, he had him christened by the name of Lescombe alone. You could hardly have anything stiffer and stronger in the territorial line than Lescombe Lescombe of Lescombe.

But the transformation of the stockbroker into the squire did not altogether work well. The old gentleman pined after business amid his lawns and groves. He could not spend the whole of his time in admiring his own grandeur. He went out shooting; but the recoil of the gun pretty well threw him over. He went out fishing; but as, on the first occasion, very rough weather nearly sent him to the fishes, he settled that "this quest was not for him."

There were only a few neighbours, who did not care for a new man. The Lord-Lieutenant declined to put him in the Commission of the Peace. But what troubled him most of all was that the territorial idea did not seem at all likely to be carried out in its integrity. He had only one living son, a few daughters who did not count for anything, and this son marrying had one daughter.

It seemed likely, therefore, that the first Lescombe of Lescombe would be the last. It was hard lines, and the old man took it to heart. He would probably have lived much longer if he had not settled at Lescombe, but had continued his Stock Exchange business with a country house at Wimbledon.

It takes three generations to make a gentleman, arguing on the unfavourable hypothesis that the original Lescombe of Lescombe hardly came under that denomination. But in the third generation the Lescombe line burst into radiant flower.

Gertrude Lescombe was a lily among lilies, a lady among ladies. An only child, motherless, living in a remote part of the country, her father's companion and help in everything, she had an unusual strength and decision of character.

Her father, born and bred in the country, had taken heavily to the pursuits which his own father had not cared for. The neighbouring squires called on him and liked him. The Lord-Lieutenant of the county invited him to be a magistrate.

The Bishop of the Diocese, holding a confirmation at Lescombe church, stayed at Lescombe Hall, and hoped that if Mr. Lescombe came to town he would look him up at the Athenæum Club.

People commonly said that Gertrude Lescombe would be a great heiress and a capital wife. A capital wife she would certainly be to any man happy enough

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to get her, but as things were going on it was by no means so clear that she would really be an heiress.

Lescombe Hall was kept up, not by the Lescombe lands, which we have seen were limited, but by a very large sum in ready money which the stockbroker had bequeathed to his son. A hundred thousand pounds is a very nice sum; but it takes a great deal of caution and trouble to place it in safe investments.

It had always been a deeply implanted maxim in Lescombe Lescombe's mind that he should never put all his eggs in one basket.

This may be very true as a general adage. But egg after egg may be broken, or basket after basket may be lost.

This was unfortunately the case in the present instance. He thought he had distributed his coin in so many good securities that he had made himself quite safe.

But when Dame Fortune begins to depress her wheel, nothing can stop that unfavourable process. Egg after egg went smash. He went into a coal-mine; the price of coal fell. He took shares in a bank; the bank broke, and the shares were put into heavy contributions. He went into a railway, and no dividend was declared. He sold out Egyptians at a heavy loss. The Turkish bonds confiscated half his remaining income.

A hundred thousand pounds is a great deal; but it will soon look foolish under such an accumulation of disasters. As a matter of fact, it evaporated entirely. It is unnecesary to go through the different stages of a sad experience which has become only too common a one in recent history. It became necessary that the estate itself should be sold to satisfy outstanding demands, and to provide a modest subsistence for a retreat at Cheltenham or Bath.

* * * * *

Two young men were sitting in the smoking-room of a London club. They had dined together, and sipped curaçoa, had had a game of billiards, and now, according to the fashion of these days, were going in for aerated waters and spirits. They were smoking meditative cigars, and were adopting that earnest business talk which men take up when their faculties are freshened up a few hours after dinner. They were evidently the kind of men who would sit up to any hour of the night, and get up at any hour of the night, and get up at any hour of the morning.

"I wish everybody had your luck," said the junior. "A legacy of ever so much money with no other condition than that you should lay it out in land. A cool hundred thousand!"

It was not very clear how even such a sum could be regarded as a matter of temperature. Major Eveleigh simply re-echoed the phrase.

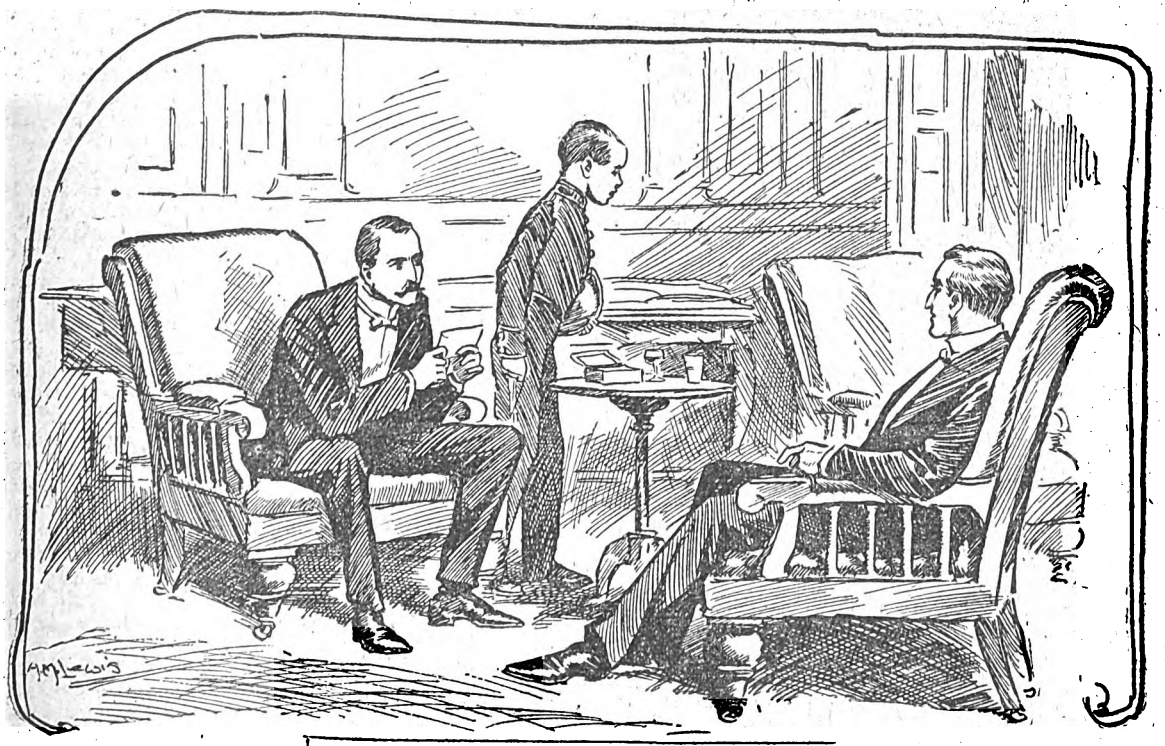
"A cool hundred thousand."

"And how are you getting on about investing in land?"

"Parker—he's my man of business—and I are doing what we can, inserting advertisements and looking out for what advertisements come in the way. We have been having a splash in the *Times*, the *Field*, and so on."

"And what have you heard?"

"Oh, several things. There's a very good place not so far from Sandringham, lots of game and fishing.



"By Jove, it's the Lescombe postmark!"

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Then there's another in Cheshire, with a lot of very good houses about. Then there's a glorious place in North Wales, with a couple of lynns and a salmon river all to yourself, as good as being in Norway. Then there's another place which I have heard of which would probably suit me best of all, only I'm afraid that there is hardly enough land, Lescombe, down in the west counties."

"Never heard of it."

"It's an uncommonly pretty place, though the world knows nothing of its prettiness. I know it very well,

"Papa, dear," she said. "What is the matter?"

although I have never been there. I think I must run down and see it. The fact is that it once belonged to my own ancestors, and my mother often used to tell me how she spent her childish days there. It was all sold off, as the proceeds had to be divided among a lot of us. The present owner has the same name as the estate, but he wants to sell it, and will take a fair price. I must get Parker to see if there is any more land to be had in the neighbourhood. I have written to Mr. Lescombe to say that I shall probably run down and look at the place, more especially as I had an old association with it."

Just at this moment a page entered the smoking-room and handed Major Eveleigh a letter on a salver.

"By Jove, it's the Lescombe postmark! Excuse me if I read it. Light up again, old man."

The Major read the letter and appeared much gratified by the contents.

"This is really very kind and gentlemanly. Read it, Hardy."

"Lescombe Hall, June 18th."

"Anniversary of the battle of Waterloo," murmured Mr. Hardy.

"Quite right, Hardy. Whatever else we forget, we will never forget the anniversary of the battle of Waterloo."

Mr. Hardy went on with the letter.

DEAR SIR,

If you have any idea of coming into our part of the country, we shall be extremely pleased if you will come and stay here as long as may suit your convenience. If you think of purchasing the place, this will give you the opportunity of acquainting yourself minutely with all the details of the property. What you say about the Hall having originally belonged to your family is full of interest to me. Their tradition still lingers in the country-side, and is uniformly favourable to them. I shall be extremely pleased to have the opportunity of showing hospitality to one who no doubt is a worthy descendant of the old owners, and may be the owner himself. You probably know that we are rather sequestered and the neighbourhood is thin, but we will do our best to make your stay pleasant. Yours faitufhlly,

LESCOMBE LESCOMBE.

* * * *

It was quite a new sensation to Major Eveleigh to find himself in the pleasant guest-chamber of the old mansion at Lescombe. From this chamber he caught a distant view of the sea, and in another direction he looked beyond the carriage-drive and the meadows to the little village and its gray tower, "standing four-square to every wind that blows."

Major Eveleigh afterwards declared that quite a remarkable mental-mood came upon him as he awoke that first morning in the guest-chamber.

"I assure you, Hardy," he once said, months and months afterwards, to his old friend, "I felt a most singular sensation. The room and every object in the room seemed strangely familiar to me. I seemed to be in a place which was perfectly familiar to me. Was it a transmitted feeling from my ancestors that I was sharing in what had been their experiences, or was it a prophetic feeling about times to come?"

He had wondered very much who the "we" could be; he had accidentally heard that there was no Mrs. Lescombe.

Did Lescombe have an editorial habit of describing his own individuality as "we," or had he any people of his own who would help to make his visit a pleasant one?

He discussed the matter as he went down by the express, and came to the sage conclusion that time would show.

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He came in late, for the train had been delayed, and after some sherry-and-water, had gone to bed.

We have made him express his feelings when he first awoke next morning. He tubbed, and felt prepared for breakfast and business.

When he came down, the "we" was most satisfactorily explained. Miss Lescombe was presiding, fresh and fair as morning itself, perhaps with a little constraint about her, but with a natural graciousness which would not, for a moment, allow him to suppose himself an unwelcome guest. Great headway was made with the breakfast, but none with the business. The curious thing was, this business was soon relegated into the background, and then seemed to vanish.

Squire Lescombe showed his guest over the house and out-buildings, conservatories and gardens; showed his horses, dogs, and stock; but it was entirely in the way that country gentlemen treat their visitors. Then he took him into the old church, where the Major worked up the arrivals, junctions, and departures of his ancestors.

It was very strange that the old clerk was liberally rewarded for his good memory. Then they went to the little bay, and henceforth the Major substituted a plunge in the sea for his morning tub.

Mr. Lescombe was a most generous type of host. Nothing was left undone that could add to the happiness of his visitor, and that without the slightest thought of selfishness. But, somehow, Gertrude Lescombe formed the chief element in that exceeding happiness.

She steered when he put the boat to sea; she rode out with him, or took him out in her governess-car to see the chief points of interest in the neighbourhood. She took him out to St. Julian's Point, that he might sketch the old ruins, and the white cliffs, and the great white sea beyond, and the contorted rocks which rose out of the depths not far from shore.

As for business, he left it to his man of business, Mr. Parker, and to the gentleman, whoever he might be, who was the Mr. Parker on the other side of the question.

Oh, why couldn't things go on in the pleasant way in which they were going on? Why should the ugly business element be always obtruding itself in the midst of pleasant things?

One day they were sitting over their wine—sitting down over port and claret, which the old stock-jobber had had down half-a-century before.

The Major was holding the glass to the light, and enjoying the ruby tint.

"Do you think you will like the place, Major?"

"I do indeed, more especially as I find there will be a good deal of land in the market soon, and Mr. Parker sends me word that he secured the refusal of it."

"My man Mr. Mordaunt, will give your man, Mr. Parker, all the deeds and particulars."

"I have told Mr. Parker that I shall be perfectly content with any proposals that Mr. Mordaunt makes."

It will be seen that our Major was not a hard man of business to deal with.

"I assure you, my dear fellow, I shall give up the place to you with greater pleasure than to any other living man. You are the right man in the right place. Your people were here, and it seems only right that you should come back to it again."

And it certainly was a case of more poetical justice than one often finds in the world. Old Lescombe bought the estate with his City money, and here comes a descendant of the old stock who buys it back.

Mr. Lescombe wanted to sell his estate. Land sells well, and hardly produces two per cent. to the buyer.

To her came the gallant Major, portfolio in hand.

He wanted the money, which would be some forty thousand pounds, which would pay off all his liabilities, and leave him the money that would suffice for watering-place existence.

But it did seem hard lines to him that he must give up the old place. He had taken to the country as thoroughly as his father before him had been unable to to do so. He now remembered that among the conditions of sale there was a sentence respecting "immediate possession." The immediate possession was all very well on the side of receiving immediate payment, but it was not so well on the side of immediately turning out.

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But it must be done, thought the Squire remorsefully. It was now becoming high time that he should look out for a new residence in Brighton or Scarborough. He must put things in order, gather up his scattered sheaves. He must begin at once, and first of all with his own private chattels and belongings.

It was a piteous sight to see the old man in his den, bringing together fishing-rods and lines, books and papers, disturbing things which all his life long had never been disturbed. He found, when the time now came that he should be transplanted, how deeply his whole being had taken root in the soil. He was soon tired and bewildered, leaning his face on his hands and moaning.

Just then Gertrude entered the room.

"Papa dear," she said, feeling uneasy, and moving quickly towards him, "what is the matter? Tell me."

"There is nothing the matter, dear; only I am rather put out this morning. It makes me sorry to leave the old place."

"Sorry! I should think so, indeed. I begin to hate that Major Eveleigh. The notion of his turning us out of doors!"

Ah, Gertrude, Gertrude, is this statement strictly veracious and historic? After all those walks and rambles, is there only a feeling of hatred implanted in your celestial breast?

"It is no fault of his, my dear," said the old man. "He only comes because I want to go. And he comes in a much more pleasant and liberal way than many would come."

"But it is so hard that we should have to go, owing to those shocking banks and railways."

"You will enjoy the change to Bath or Cheltenham, my dear. Plenty of society, promenades, balls, concerts."

"Some girls might enjoy it, papa, but not I; at least not for more than a week or two. I think Lescombe the most beautiful spot in the whole world; the sea, the combes, the moor, the mountains, the woods."

"I know it, my dear. I know it as well as you do. But, Gertrude, you are not a child. You know all my affairs as well as I know them myself. Let us be grateful that this sale will enable us to leave the place with honour, and live pleasantly in a pleasant place."

On several occasions he afterwards descanted on the glories of Brighton and Scarborough. But though Gertrude tried to appear delighted with his description, she retained her private conviction that Lescombe was the centre of the universe.

* * * * *

One day she had been sitting on a mossy stone beneath an ancient arch of the ruins of St. Julian's Chapel.

"To her," as they say in the playbook came the gallant Major, portfolio in hand, to complete some sketches of the ruins and of the scenery about them. However hateful he might be as the earlier proprietor of Lescombe, still the monster drew so well that he was quite capable of giving Gertrude Lescombe a few useful hints. They both worked together for half-an-hour.

"Well this is a beautiful place," said the Major, really with a keen love of fine scenery.

But the words grated unpleasantly on Gertrude's ear, as if they conveyed a thorough appreciation of newly-acquired property.

"Dear old Lescombe!" said the girl, and the fair lips began to quiver and the eyelashes were wet.

The Major did not observe these signs of emotion, and proceeded:

"I shall not make any alteration. The place is simply perfect. I shall leave everything exactly as it is. I really cannot make out why the Squire should want to give up the place. He cannot be so well off anywhere else."

Looking at his companion's face the Major saw that she was moved with deep emotion. She turned her face away and raised her hand to screen herself from observation.

"Miss Lescombe—Gertrude," he exclaimed, "what on earth is the matter? It is impossible that I can have said anything to give you pain. I would rather cut off my right hand than do so."

"It is not your fault, I know very well, Major Eveleigh; but we are so very, very, sorry to leave the old place. Why do we leave it? You don't suppose we should leave it unless we were obliged to leave."

"Obliged!" echoed the Major, with a genuine look of amazement. "I had really never thought of the matter from that point of view."

Neither had he. His own impressions had been, as he afterwards had an opportunity for explaining, that the squire, having no son, did not care to keep such a big place in hand, and thought of retiring to some fashionable locality.

Unfortunately in these days it is no new thing for people to give up country estates and retire into fashionable centres.

"Now Gertrude, dear Gertrude listen to me," said the Major, placing his hand on her arm in a beseeching mood. "You may be sure that I do not want you to leave Lescombe. Ever since I have known you I have the ambition to make you in real truth the mistress of Lescombe, and the place would lose all its charms if you would not stay here as my wife."

And now Gertrude was trembling as well as crying.

"And as for the dear old man, I shall be delighted if he will stay here altogether, exactly as he used to do. We will be as happy as we have been during the last few weeks."

And the happy girl was obliged to confess that if she loved Lescombe and her father, she also truly loved Frank Eveleigh.

I do not exactly know what were the settlements and the business arrangements. They were in the safe hands of Mr Parker and the gentleman on the other side.

As the Major lucidly explained the matter, any money he put into the estate would eventually come back to him. It was only taking money out of one waistcoat pocket and putting into the other. Hardy was the "best man" on the occasion of the marriage. Gertrude finds that, much as she loves Lescombe a run on the Continent and a season in town are endurable.

The Squire continues the virtual lord of Lescombe. The Eveleighs have two sons; and one of them, christened Lescombe, is to assume the name and arms of his grandfather; so that there is every probability that there will yet be another Lescombe Lescombe of Lescombe.

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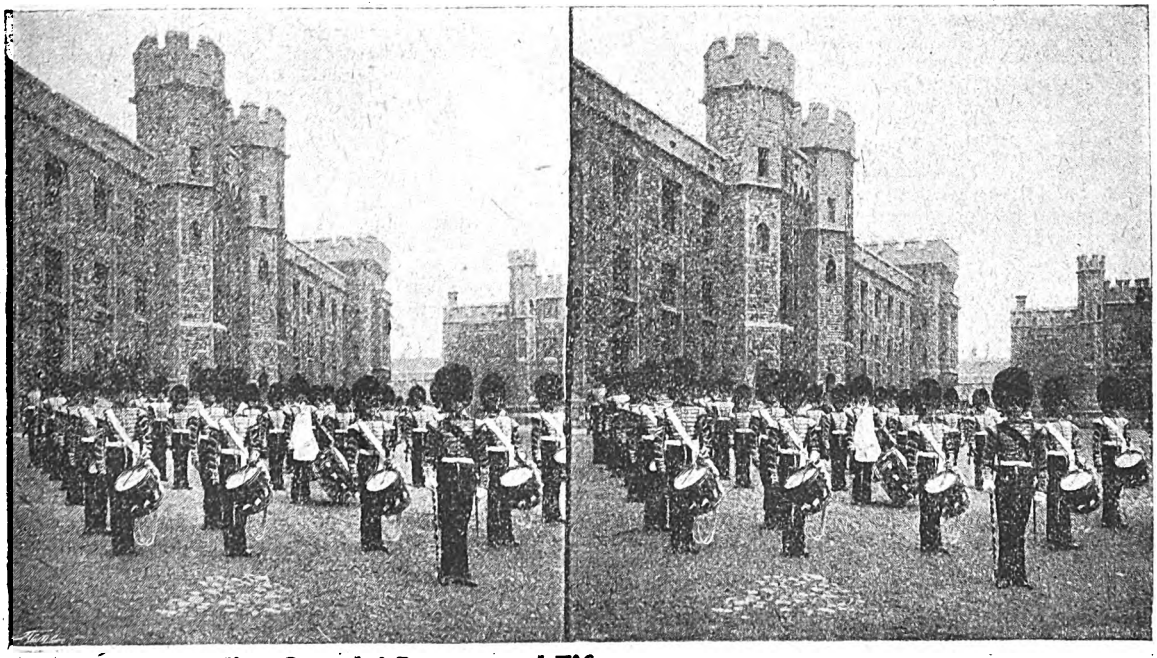
Our Stereoscopic Gallery.

In Kew Gardens.



The Grenadier Guards' Drums and Fifes.

Readers will be pleased to hear that we are now giving away Stereoscopes in connection with our WEEKLY POSTCARD COMPETITION.—See page 553.

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New Serial.—Start To-day.

By HEADON HILL.

Author of "The Peril of the Prince," "Seaward for the Foe," "Guilty Gold," etc.

SUMMARY.

THE steamship *Trojan* is homeward bound from the Cape. On board is Michael Standridge, who is returning to England from the Kimberley diamond fields, in possession of the "Kimberley Elephant," the largest diamond found in the colony. On the ship is his half-brother, Simon Hoathley. On the way up the English Channel the latter steals into the miner's cabin with the intention of murdering him and obtaining possession of the diamond. The miner, however, is on the alert, and presents a pistol at the intruder's head.

Michael sells his diamond for £20,000 to Messrs. Strauss and Lightfoot, whose clerk, Swinley Tasker, he discovers in an attempt to rob him of £35. Michael reads Tasker a lecture, kicks him, and departs—having made an enemy of this rascal. Reading is where Michael expects to find news of his daughter, and he purchases Kennett's Cross, a dilapidated farmhouse in the neighbourhood, this house meeting his requirements by being very secluded, and on a clay soil suitable for brickmaking.

He spends his time in making bricks, and as each batch is made he draws out from the bank a thousand pounds in gold, until at length his balance is quite low. One day Michael is thrown out of his pony-trap, and enters a house for assistance. Here he finds Cuthbert Blakesley, the cashier at the bank, and two ladies, and recognises in the younger one, to whom Cuthbert is engaged to be married, a strong resemblance to his wife.

Mrs. Bonfield is able to prove that Marion is Michael's daughter, and he promises to acquaint her shortly with the secret of Kennett's Cross. A few weeks later Marion and Cuthbert are sitting in the garden, waiting for her father, when a constable enters and arrests Cuthbert on the charge of murdering Michael.

CHAPTER V. (*continued*).

HOATHLEY AND TASKER MEET TO DISCUSS THINGS.

"WELL, you are a fair scorcher, Hoathley," exclaimed the clerk under his breath. "I have been expecting you this hour or more, but I had pretty well given you up after reading that"

"I don't know why you should," said he of the swivel eye. "When first I had the good fortune to make your acquaintance over the sale of my few diamonds—when, in fact, you were able by a lucky fluke to put me on the track I had lost—I told you brother Michael was not likely to pan out as a profitable investment for a life assurance office. But this is a regular thoroughfare. You know the ropes here better than I do; where can we have a quiet chat far from the madding crowd?"

Tasker rose, and leading his companion into the Hall piloted him across it in the rear of the spectators to the prompt side, where they mounted a flight of stairs giving access to a space behind the private boxes which was known as the "box-lounge." Here there were couches and luxurious chairs; but the stage being invisible from it, the place was deserted and they found themselves quite alone. On three sides of the lounge the wall was mirrored from floor to ceiling; on the fourth were the baize-covered doors of the private boxes, each with its closed door.

Tasker was the first to speak—in a hushed undertone that precluded all chance of its being overheard by the occupants of the private boxes. "You seem to take it pretty coolly," he said. "If I were in your shoes I shouldn't feel inclined to chaff."

Simon Hoathley smiled an evil smile. "But, my dear young friend," he replied. "You are in my shoes, or rather your shoes are precisely of the same make and fit as mine. Whatever risks I run are, by the laws of our country, yours also—notwithstanding that I have borne the burden and heat of a particularly sultry time. We are both in it up to the eyes—the part you have already played puts that beyond doubt—and we must sink or swim together. But you need have no apprehension on that head. Have you not just read that the excellent police have discovered a clue?"

The question was accompanied by a wink of the unstable eye, and Tasker, after a puzzled stare at his companion's face, broke into a low whistle of relieved comprehension.

"I think I tumble to the state of affairs," he said with satisfaction. "We must go downstairs and drink to the success of the police presently. But how about the business part of the adventure? It came off all right in your capable hands, I suppose?"

The inquiry caused a quick change to come over Simon Hoathley's demeanour. The forbidding playfulness—the playfulness of the tiger—which he usually affected, left him, and his yellow face puckered with a hundred vexed wrinkles as he replied with a savage snarl:

"Not yet, but it shall—so help me Satan, Tasker, it shall—before a week is past. There was a cursed hitch in the programme—a flaw in the scheme that could not possibly have been provided for—which leaves the best part of the work to be done yet. Listen," and he bent low and whispered half-a-dozen rapid sentences in the other's ear.

The diamond-broker's clerk received the communication with muttered imprecations, and then eyed his companion askance, a look of cunning distrust spreading over his wily features.

"Play fair, old man," he said, "share and share alike, you know—that was the arrangement. You've gone and put it away somewhere. I'm not quite such a flat as to believe that yarn."

Simon Hoathley resumed his light and airy manner, patting Tasker on the shoulder soothingly as he replied:

"What a suspicious youth it is, then—thinking that a pal would be guilty of such conduct as that. Why, you young fool," he added more seriously, "common sense ought to tell you that I am keeping nothing from you. If there were any grounds for your suggestions, don't you see

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that I should have been on my way to foreign parts by this time. What would have been the good of my keeping my appointment with you this afternoon?"

The answer must have been convincing, for Tasker accepted it with a half grudging apology. "No occasion to cut up rough," he said, "I was only throwing out a feeler—mostly in fun. You are pretty confident, then, that the stuff is all right?"

"It's to be had for the finding and the fetching. I am as certain of it as I am that—that the police have a clue," affirmed Hoathley with an evil grin. "And the beauty of it is that Michael was such a scheming old fox that there is not much risk of our being forestalled, which means that his foxiness will tend to the defeat of his own ends. I intend to wait and see what crops up at the inquest, and then have a regular good go in. As like as not, the place will be shut up and left to itself in a day or two, in which case we shall have a little picnic on the job without fear of interruption. If we didn't see our way clear, I might go in as the new tenant. One thing you can bet your boots on, and that is that Simon Hoathley hasn't taken his last long farewell of Kennett's Cross yet—not by a long chalk."

"Then for the present we pursue a policy of masterly inactivity," said Tasker, "and—read the papers diligently?"

"And read the papers with a special eye for local affairs in the Reading district," assented the elder man. "A good deal may depend on testamentary dispositions, and other contingencies with which I need not trouble a gentleman of your intelligence. We will meet again to-morrow—say at Tamponi's in the evening—and discuss the matter with its further developments, if any."

"Right you are," replied Tasker. "And, that being arranged, let us mingle with the festive throng below, and drink to the success of the police."

They rose together with the intention of going down to the bar on the ground floor, but before they could reach the head of the stairs the latch of one of the private boxes clicked, and a man came out rather hurriedly, turning to give them one keen, comprehensive glance as he preceded them to the stairs. Despite his haste, and firm, well set-up build, he crossed the lounge with a silent, gliding motion that took him out of sight as quickly as though a ghost had flitted by—leaving only the impression of that one piercing look.

"Curious cove, that," remarked Tasker, as they descended the stairs.

"He is all that," replied Hoathley. "Those eyes would give a nervous man the creeps—especially if he was not a righteous man. It is as well we took the precaution of conversing in so low a tone that nobody in the boxes could possibly have overheard us. That gentleman is not at all the sort of person whom I should like to intrust with so much as a sniff of our little secrets. I wonder who he is?"

By this time they had reached the foot of the stairs and were approaching the adjacent bar, round which was grouped the dead-head contingent with sundry additions made since Tasker's defection. The house was very full, every inch of standing space being occupied, and though he had preceded them by but a few steps, the late tenant of the private box had disappeared in the crowd.

"I haven't an idea," replied Tasker to Hoathley's inquiry, "but here is the Fleet Street division mustered in force, and what they don't know isn't worth knowing. I'll bet one of the *Yeller-Feller* boys can tell us. Here, Piffler, did you see a mysterious stranger come down from the boxes in front of us a moment ago? He seems to have done a slope."

"Certainly I did," said the person addressed; "do you call yourself a round-the-towner, Swinley, and don't know that astute practitioner by sight? He is engaged on some case here for the management, I believe, which accounts for his presence in the music hall. The merry song and dance isn't much in his line, I expect, except in the way of business. That is Zambra, the detective—the only man of his trade worth a cent."

The journalist turned again to his associates, and Hoathley, putting his arm through Tasker's, drew the latter aside.

"My young friend," he said, "I know that man by reputation. It is a fortunate thing for the proper solution of the Kennett's Cross mystery that the police, and not he, have the handling of it. If I had to cross swords with Zambra, I might come out on top, but it would be touch and go."

And then they pledged each other, little thinking, amid the lights, the music, and the laughter, that the silent figure who had passed across their view would, ere many days were sped, be intimately bound up with the case which Simon Hoathley desired to bring to a "satisfactory" conclusion.

CHAPTER VI.

The Case Against Cuthbert Blakesly.

The events which led to the arrest of Cuthbert Blakesly will be best explained by setting down here the proceedings which took place at the inquest held on the following Monday morning in the great stone-paved kitchen of Kennett's Cross. Before doing so, however, it is necessary briefly to describe the house in which Michael Standridge had taken up his abode.

The building was of red brick with a gaunt, angular gable at each end. The front door, which was reached by a straight garden path from the lane, was in the centre On either side of the front door was the window of a sitting-room, the room on the right being the one in constant use by Michael, while the left-hand room was unfurnished, and was devoted only to the storage of corn for the pony, harness tools, and other odds and ends.

Behind the right-hand sitting-room was the old farm-house kitchen, dating evidently from the days when it was customary for yeomen to board and lodge their unmarried labourers, and having accommodation for a goodly number. On the other side, behind the unoccupied front room, was a dairy, with one or two smaller rooms originally intended for storing fruit and provisions, but quite unused by Michael.

The stairs leading to the upper regions started on the right of a small square entrance-hall from a point just beyond the door of a living room, and ran up to a first landing, whence a few steps at right angles gave access to the main landing, upon which were the doors of the two principal bedrooms. Here, also, were the entrances to two passages running right and left, by means of which the smaller bedrooms were reached. Michael, in choosing his bedroom, had been faithful to the right-hand side of the house, using the apartment immediately over his living room.

Under the stairs in the hall was a door giving access to a flight of stone steps which led to the cellar. The latter occupied the whole of the space below the kitchen, and had originally consisted of one long under-ground chamber without partition of any kind; but Michael Standridge had made certain alterations in its arrangement, which will be described in the evidence. It is only necessary to say here that those alterations plainly pointed to the object of his amateur brick-making.

Outside, in the rear of the house, the traces of these operations were very noticeable. In the immediate vicinity of the back premises was a good-sized tract of garden ground, uncultivated and overgrown with weeds. This was inclosed on the two sides by a dilapidated post and rail fence, but the extreme end was separated from the Paddock by a new brick wall of recent construction, standing some five feet high. The wall Michael had built himself with the bricks he had left after completing the work in the cellar; and he had been heard to say that he should one

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day or other amuse himself by continuing it round the whole of the garden. The barns and farm-buildings had once stood at the side of the house, but they had long since been removed, with the exception of a single shed which served as a stable for Michael's pony.

Beyond the new brick wall lay the paddock or meadow which had offered to the purchaser of Kennett's Cross his chief attraction in the thick layer of stiff yellow clay which underlay the surface soil. The grass had nearly disappeared and the whole area was cut up from end to end by excavations from which Michael had dug the clay, while all round were strewn the *débris* of damaged bricks and heaps of and unused material.

Such part of the ground as was not covered in this manner was cut up by the tracks of the wheelbarrow in which the bricks had been carried to the house, and in one corner stood the blackened remains of the rude kiln. It was a dreary scene, more suggestive of a suburban estate in process of "development" than of a country homestead, and many had been the inquisitive glances cast from the distant high road at the old miner's efforts to destroy the face of nature.

But on this Monday morning the interest centred on the front of the house where a couple of policemen kept guard at the door to repress the eagerness of those who desired to enter. By ten o'clock the long kitchen was already packed to its fullest capacity, and late comers had either to take their place in an overflow crowd that thronged round the open windows, or wandered about the lane in quest of the latest rumour of what was doing inside.

The coroner had thought fit to hold his court on the scene of the crime—in the first place because there was no public room available in the neighbourhood, and secondly because there were circumstances which made it desirable that the jury should obtain more than a cursory view of the interior of Kennett's Cross. The panel was composed of tradesmen and farmers from surrounding yet distant villages, and very few of them had ever before set foot in the lonely farmhouse—none in the time of its most recent occupant.

The jury, after a solemn visit to the front parlour, whence they returned with very grave faces, had to fight their way back to the long kitchen table through a crowd of witnesses, policemen, and such of the general public as had been able to gain admission.

Pale and restless Cuthbert Blakesly stood at the far end of the room in the custody of the two constables. He was not handcuffed, and every possible consideration was paid to him, but all too plainly he showed traces of the terrible strain of the last two days; or as the reporters put it afterwards, he seemed to feel his position acutely. Contrary to advice, he had insisted on his right to be present and give evidence, and even now, at the eleventh hour, the local solicitor, who had been retained in his interest, was trying to persuade him into silence, but with no effect.

The lawyer's efforts only seemed to irritate him, and to increase his nervous impatience for his turn to come.

After formal evidence of identification had been given the first witness called was William Gannaway, who described himself as a journeyman tailor of Wilmingham, a village two miles away.

He said, in answer to questions by the coroner:

"On the morning of Saturday, the 9th inst.—the day before yesterday—I called here about half-past ten, according to order, to fetch some clothes for repair. I knocked several times at the front door, and not getting any answer I began to think that the gentleman was out, and had forgotten the appointment. I was turning to go away when I noticed that the brass knob of the door was smeared with a dark red stain. This set me thinking, and I went to the parlour window to see if anybody was about. Then for the first time I saw that the blind was down, and that I could get no view of the inside of the room. What with the stain on the door handle, and the blind being down at that hour of the day, things seemed so queer that I returned to Wilmingham as quickly as I could to tell the policeman. On the way I met Constable Wheeler, and came back with him. At his request, however, I remained outside while he went into the house."

David Wheeler, police constable, stationed at Wilmingham, was then sworn, and deposed as follows:

"Owing to the communication made to me by the last witness, I proceeded to Kennett's Cross on Saturday morning at eleven o'clock. The door handle was stained with what looked like blood, and the blind of the right-hand sitting room was down. I managed to open the front door without disturbing the stain. The door was not locked or bolted in any way—merely closed. I saw nothing remarkable in the hall, but on entering the right-hand parlour, I found the body of the deceased lying just within the doorway. I drew up the blind, and then recognized the body as that of the owner of the house, whom I knew very well by sight. He was quite dead and cold, and there was much blood about, which seemed to come from a wound behind the shoulder blade. I sent the last witness, Gannaway, to Wilmingham, with instructions to telegraph to the Superintendent, and I remained on the premises till he arrived."

Mr. Gunning, the Superintendent of the County Police, stationed at Reading, then gave evidence.

"On receipt of a telegram to the effect that Mr. Wilson —or Standridge, as I understand is his right name—had been found dead, I proceeded to this house, taking with me Inspector Dimmock and a constable. Before starting, I notified Dr. Carstairs, the police surgeon, and the doctor was on the spot almost as soon as we were. On arrival I was met by Constable Wheeler, who pointed out the stain on the door handle. He also informed me that he had not moved the body, and that nothing had been touched but the window blind. I proceeded to the front sitting-room, and there saw the deceased lying face downwards on the floor, about two paces inside the doorway. I left him in the hands of the doctor, and with the assistance of Inspector Dimmock, made a thorough examination of the premises. We could discover no signs of a forcible entry, nor were there any marks of a struggle. The room over the parlour is furnished as a bedroom, but the bed had not been slept in the previous night. On the table in the sitting-room there were a decanter of whisky more than half full, a jug of water and two glasses. On the mantelpiece was a box of cigars, and there were several stumps of cigars lying in the empty grate. The other bedrooms were unfurnished and quite empty, and the sitting-room opposite that, where the body was found, had only been used as a lumber room."

"You next explored the cellar, I think?" asked the coroner, amid a craning of necks and shuffling of feet, which showed the interest aroused by the question.

"I did," proceeded the superintendent. "The cellar itself was quite empty, but about nine feet of the far end had been cut off by a new brick wall built from floor to ceiling. In the centre of this wall was an iron door, such as is used in bankers' and jewellers' strong rooms. The place was, in fact, a strong room, and I may say that we fully expected to find something of the kind. The rumours of the deceased's doings in this direction have been notorious for some time."

"Was the strong room locked?" asked the coroner.

"It was," said Mr. Gunning, "and the lock was a very powerful and complicated one. It was quite impossible to open it without the proper key; and knowing that the deceased had banked with the Metropolitan and Counties at Reading, I sent a constable to Mr. Oakley, the manager, to see if he could throw any light on the matter. Being Saturday, the bank had closed when the constable called, but he found the manager at his private residence. Mr. Oakley came out to Kennett's Cross at once, bringing with him a letter intrusted to him under the circumstances which he will himself describe. The letter, which was marked, 'To be opened only in the event of my death,'

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disclosed the whereabouts of the missing key. I produce the letter."

The document in question consisted of only a few lines, which the coroner read out as follows:

"I have concealed the key of the strong room in the small back bedroom at the east end of the house. Raise the fourth plank from the fireplace."

The letter was dated 16th March—three days after the purchase of the iron door, as it was afterwards proved.

"On searching the spot indicated," continued the Superintendent, "I found the key hidden in the flooring. Accompanied by Inspector Dimmock and by Mr. Oakley, I then returned to the cellar and opened the strong room. The partition wall in which the door was set was of great thickness, and the original walls of the cellar inside the chamber had been lined with fresh bricks to the depth of a foot. At the further end of the strong room was a wooden shelf, on which lay fourteen brown-paper sovereign bags, bearing the rubber stamp of the Metropolitan and Counties Bank at Reading. The bags were empty, and there was no money or any other valuables in the strong room."

The audience shuffled and whispered again on hearing the implied suggestion that a robbery had been committed. Evidently, the Kennett's Cross tragedy was to lack no details that could add to the popular excitement, and excitement was a rare luxury to the Berkshire rustics.

The Superintendent, after adding that he had then dispatched Detective-Inspector Dimmock to make inquiries, stepped down, and his place was taken by Dr. Carstairs, who briefly but clearly described the nature of the fatal wound that had been inflicted on the deceased. It was a long, clean stab, that must have been struck from behind, entering below the left blade-bone and penetrating to the heart. Death must have been quite instantaneous. From the position of the body and the angle at which the blow was struck, it was nearly certain that both the deceased and his assailant were standing up at the time. It was about two o'clock on Saturday when he first saw the body, and in his opinion life had been then extinct quite twelve hours—it might be more, but it could not be less. Any idea of suicide or accident was absolutely out of the question in the case. The weapon with which the deed was done must have been both heavy and sharp, and it had not been found.

The next witness called was John Perkins, a farm labourer. He said, in answer to questions:

"I work at Langston's farm, half-way betwixt here and Reading, on the main road. About ten o'clock on Friday evening Farmer Langston sent for me to come and help put out some furze that had caught fire on the road-side close to the rick-yard. I was busy there with my mates beating out the fire till half-past eleven. A little before that time, as I was standing close to the road, a gent came along on a bicycle, going towards Reading. He sang out to know what was up, and I told him. He didn't stop, but I had a good look at him by the light of the burning furze. That's the gent, over there," he added, pointing to where Cuthbert Blakesly was standing.

Langston, the farmer near whose premises the fire had occurred, also testified to having seen a young man pass on a bicycle coming from the direction of Kennett's Cross at the hour named. He could not, however, positively swear that the prisoner was the man.

Detective-Inspector Dimmock was then called, and made the following statement:

"In consequence of a communication made by the last witness, and of other information received, I went on Saturday afternoon to 3 Woodstock Villas, Reading, where the prisoner Blakesly lodges. He was out, but in a shed in the garden I saw a bicycle, which I was told belonged to him. The machine had evidently been put away just as it returned from a journey, without being cleaned. On the woodwork of the right-hand handle I found several smears which looked like blood. There was also a congealed drop on the nickel-plated bell which had the same appearance.

STARVED, NOT MAD.

When King Lear is forsaken by his two ungrateful daughters, Goneril and Regan, and is deserted by all save his jester and the Duke of Kent, he goes stark mad; he thinks that he is king again, and he stalks over the desolate heath wearing a rude crown of wisps of straw.

In G. R. Sims' "Christmas Day in the Workhouse," starved "Nancy" raved, until, says the pauper, "She talked like the bonnie lassie I wooed on the Devon shore." Quite a different form of starvation caused Mrs. A. M. Sharp, Moat Cottages, Fordwich, near Canterbury, to write these lines:—

"At times, in truth, I was really light-headed, if not quite mad, and did the most extraordinary things." Let us begin at the beginning, and come to the madness. "Until I was 24 years old my health was generally good. I married when I was between 22 and 23, and two months after the birth of my little girl all life, energy, and ambition seemed to go out of me.

"I could only relish a little potato with gravy or butter, and I grew so thin that folks thought I was in a decline. My food seemed to stop in my throat, and it made me feel bad in the chest." Mrs. Sharp's heart was next attacked. "A cruel, suffocating sensation seized me," she says; "my heart palpitated so that I could scarcely draw my breath. Many are the nights that, before I tried Mother Seigel's Syrup, I have gone to bed with a dreadful feeling that something terrible was going to happen.

"I used to wake with a start—gasping and fighting for breath. I was terrified at being left alone. Perspiration, from fear, would run off me, and fits of shivering used to seize me. I thought I had heart disease, and altogether I consulted five doctors. In spite of that, I went from bad to worse. One day my husband came home and said that a man had advised him to try Seigel's Curative Syrup, so we got a bottle.

"At the third bottle there was no mistaking my progress. The heart depression was less, the appetite improved, and I enjoyed my meals. With Seigel's Syrup health and strength gradually returned, and I began to again get stout and jolly. —Dec. 20th, 1900."

(1) What made Mrs. Sharp think that she was stark mad and in a decline? (2) Why are there at least a dozen empty Seigel's bottles now in the house? (1) Because the brain and the blood corpuscles of the body were shockingly starved by bad Indigestion. (2) Because Seigel's Syrup keeps the stomach clear of impediments to digestion, and acts as a tonic.

King Lear's madness may be traceable to shock, but there are lesser and more numerous head and brain disorders traceable only to the human stomach.

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I reported what I had found to Mr. Superintendent Gunning, who then decided to arrest Mr. Blakesly. I was present at his apprehension in the garden of 'The Limes.' I conveyed the prisoner to Reading, and afterwards searched his rooms, where I found a pair of shirt-cuffs (produced) stained with blood, and also a pocket-handkerchief in the same condition. The prisoner was taken before a magistrate on Saturday evening and was remanded for a week."

Cuthbert's solicitor put one question in cross-examination to this witness.

"Were the cuffs and handkerchief concealed, or were they in such a place as they might have been expected to be found in, had the stains not been the result of a crime?" he asked.

"The articles were with the rest of his soiled linen," was the reply.

The evidence of the inspector clearly made a great impression on the jury and on the audience. It sounded the first note of something tangible in the case, and showed that the police had more definite grounds for the arrest than had been hitherto supposed. Till the inspector told of the bloodstained linen and the smears on the bicycle, the popular supposition was that the police had acted hastily on the strength of Blakesly's known intimacy with the dead man, and of his proved presence in the neighbourhood on the night of the murder.

Both these grounds for suspicion might be capable of explanation, but now in the tell-tale stains an element had been introduced into the charge, which it would not be so easy to refute. The glances of pity and sympathy which had hitherto been directed at the young man became fewer, and looks of horror and astonishment began to take their place.

But, as yet, there was one point which was puzzling the spectators sorely. How had the robbery been effected? The strong room had been found empty, but it was also locked, and the lock was untampered with. It must, therefore, have been opened with the key, and yet the key was discovered in the original hiding place devised by its owner—a hiding place of which the only record was to be found in the letter which he had deposited at the bank in the event of emergencies. It was known that he must have been possessed of between fourteen and fifteen thousand pounds in gold, and yet this large sum had vanished without a trace, while the stronghold, which had been without doubt specially constructed for its preservation, was intact and its key hidden.

The next witness called was Mr. Oakley, the manager of the Metropolitan and Counties Bank, and almost the first question put to him showed that he was there for the purpose of throwing light on this all important point.

The bank manager was a quiet, business-like man of fifty, but his natural self-possession seemed for the moment to be shaken. He clearly appreciated the significance of the evidence he was called upon to give.

"With reference to this letter describing the position of the key of the strong room," asked the coroner, "will you be good enough to tell us when it reached you?"

"It was placed in my hands on the day of its date—March 15th," was the reply.

"It is written on paper bearing the bank's heading, and is inclosed in one of the bank's envelopes, is it not?"

"That is so."

"The presumption being that it was written by the deceased at the counter of the bank on materials which he had obtained from one of the clerks?"

"I was given to understand that such was the case."

"Now, will you please state the exact circumstances under which the letter reached you, and whether you noticed anything peculiar in its condition at the time?"

"The letter was brought to me in my private room," replied Mr. Oakley, "with an intimation that Mr. Wilson—as he was then known—desired me to take care of it, and only open it in the event of his death. I was about to put it away in the safe, with another document previously received from him, when I saw that the flap of the envelope had not been properly stuck down. The mucilage was still wet as though the ineffectual attempt to fasten it had only just been made. I completed the fastening, without, of course, withdrawing the letter, and put it away in the safe."

"From what you say, it would have been quite possible for the person who carried the letter from the counter to your private room to have mastered the contents on the way?"

"The letter being practically an open one there would have been no difficulty in his doing so," was the reply.

"And who was it," asked the coroner, amid an awe-stricken hush, "who brought you that letter?"

The manager's reply came in tones which showed how deeply he felt the fatal nature of the blow he was compelled to strike.

"My cashier, Mr. Blakesly," he said.

CHAPTER VII.

The Prisoner's Story.

There was dead silence for nearly a minute after the manager's last answer.

The justification of the police in arresting the young cashier was now complete; the strength of the chain that bound him seemed unbreakable, and the prevailing sentiment was one of wonder that public opinion should have been so much at fault in forming an estimate of Cuthbert Blakesly's character.

He had always been regarded as a "good fellow" all round, frank and trustworthy above all things, and certainly the last man in the world to stab his friend from behind for the sake of gold. But freely accorded doubt had to yield to unwelcome certainty. The late bicycle journey, the blood stains, the empty strong room, which could only have been opened by one knowing where the key lay hid, the proof that young Blakesly alone, with the exception of the manager, could have had that knowledge—all these points taken collectively formed an array of circumstantial evidence that fitted together with convincing nicety.

A further question elicited the fact that the prisoner necessarily was aware that the deceased had regularly been withdrawing large amounts in gold, and Mr. Oakley's examination was brought to an end. The coroner at once said:

"That, gentlemen, is the whole of the evidence I had proposed to lay before you—I may say that in Mr. Blakesly's interest it is all the evidence I should have wished to lay before you, for as he is already charged by the police your verdict can make but little difference to him. I understand, however, that he insists on his right to be called, and I am bound to receive his evidence."

Cuthbert had already pressed forward to the end of the table, followed by his attendant policemen, and was waiting to be sworn. Well he knew that in this humble court alone would he have the privilege of telling his story with his own lips, and his eagerness to begin was painful to behold. Was it to be a refutation or a halting excuse, the people wondered.

He took the oath impatiently, and was opening his mouth to speak when the coroner interrupted him. "It is my duty to tell you, Mr. Blakesly," he said, "that you are not bound to say anything which may incriminate yourself—in fact, in order to avoid asking you questions which you might decline to answer, I shall allow you simply to give us your version of the affair in your own way. At the same time I must warn you that if you say anything now that is capable of disproof it will seriously damage your defence hereafter."

The prisoner chafed visibly during the interruption.

"I am not here to pick and choose what I shall say," he began hotly. "I have come here to tell all I know—and it

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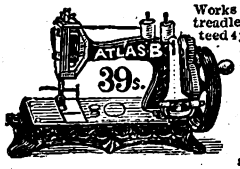

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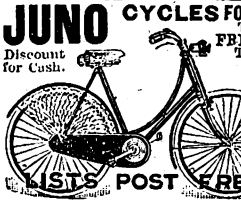

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is little enough—in the hope that in defending myself I may incriminate the guilty, for, before Heaven, I am innocent of this dastardly deed. Some fiendish combination of circumstances must have pursued me, for every word of the evidence that has been brought is true—as true as the deductions from it are false. It is true that I was at Kennett's Cross on Friday night; true that, when I started to return home, I was stained with blood; true also that, if the letter describing the position of the key was, as Mr. Oakley says, unfastened, I had an opportunity of reading it—and yet, in the face of all these truths, I am innocent of killing Michael Standridge, and innocent of robbing him. More than that, I did not even know he was dead till the police arrested me; and, as for the key, I was ignorant of its existence till it was mentioned in court an hour ago. I am not in the habit of peering into private letters."

He paused for a moment, then went on more calmly:

"All this is mere assertion, and I had better detail facts. On Friday afternoon, by the two o'clock delivery, I received a letter from Mr. Standridge asking me to come out to Kennett's Cross the same evening and confer with him on a matter of importance. The letter ended with a request that I would mention my visit to no one, either before or afterwards, and asked that for the purpose of preserving secrecy I would destroy the letter as soon as read. As I obeyed the injunction and tore the letter up immediately, I am unable to produce it, but that was the gist of the communication, except that nine o'clock was appointed for the time of my call. I may mention here that the injunction to secrecy in the letter was the sole reason why I had abstained from mentioning my journey hither previous to my arrest. Of course, I can easily see how that silence must tell against me.

"I was somewhat surprised at the invitation, for, though I had been on very good terms with Mr Standridge since he became a customer of the bank, I knew that he had some objection to receiving visitors at Kennett's Cross. There was, however, one matter of a private nature, which I do not care to allude to here, about which he might wish to see me, and I decided at once to keep the appointment. It was a fine evening, and I left Reading on my bicycle at eight making the run in a little under the hour. I dismounted at the garden gate, and leaving the bicycle against the fence I walked up the path and knocked at the front door. The blind of the sitting-room was down but I could see that there was a light in the room, and immediately after my knock a shadow passed across the blind.

"I thought that Mr. Standridge had risen to come and open the front door, but instead of that I heard steps receding up the stairs. Almost directly the right hand bedroom window was raised, and Mr. Standridge called down, 'Who is it?' I answered, giving my name, and the deceased then came down and opened the door. 'It's you, then,' he said. 'Well, come in; I don't receive visitors as a rule, but I'll make an exception in your favour; I've been looking for a chance of a quiet chat with you.' After carefully closing and locking the house door, he led the way into the sitting-room, and bade me make myself comfortable. He produced the spirits and cigars which were mentioned this morning, and we sat smoking and talking for a long while—quite a couple of hours, I should say, though I took no particular note of the time. Somewhat to my surprise, Mr. Standridge did not broach the subject which I had imagined to be the cause of his invitation, nor did he allude to the invitation itself. I, therefore, towards the end of my stay, introduced it myself, and I wish to say frankly that we were not in perfect accord on this matter. There was nothing of the nature of an unpleasantness, but he gave me to understand very decidedly that he was not yet prepared to meet my views, and that——"

Here the coroner interposed again:

"We all quite appreciate your delicacy," he said, "in not alluding to the subject of your conversation with the deceased, but I am told there exists a well-founded impression as to what it was. In such a serious case you would do well to be explicit, in order to prevent a wrongful, and possibly too harsh, construction being put upon your disagreement. Rumour says that you have been paying your addresses to the young lady who has recently been acknowledged by the deceased as his daughter. Do you allege that you talked on nothing more contentious than Mr. Standridge's consent to your union?"

A look of annoyance passed over Cuthbert's face and he restrained his anger with obvious difficulty.

"I had hoped," he said "that her name might have been kept out of the case entirely, but as the gossips seem to have fastened on it already, I may as well confirm your surmise. I have been engaged to Miss Standridge for two years, and when her father appeared I was naturally anxious to obtain his countenance and consent. The position he took up was that he would like to know me a little better before sanctioning a marriage. He did not by any means give me a definite refusal; he merely stipulated for time, and I, not unnaturally, took a contrary view, especially as he had questioned me very fully during the early part of the evening on my family history and prospects.

"In spite of our difference we remained the best of friends; and when at last I got up to go Mr. Standridge accompanied me to the door. There were two bolts—top and bottom—a heavy chain, and an ordinary lock, all of which he had to unfasten before he could let me out. I was in complete ignorance of the strong room, and not a word had been said by either of us about his property, but seeing the precautions he took to guard his house, I could not help thinking of the gold withdrawals.

"When at length the door was opened, we stood a few moments saying our last words, Mr. Standridge being good-naturedly anxious that I should not be disheartend by what he had said.

"It was fine and starlight; but there was no moon, so that objects at a little distance were very indistinctly seen. Suddenly, just as we were about to part—I to go down the path to my bicycle, and the deceased to re-enter the house—we heard a scuffling sound at the gate, and then a horrible—almost human—screech, three or four times repeated.

"I ran down the path, followed more slowly by Mr. Standridge who seemed to leave the door with some reluctance.

"Outside the gate in the road I found a half-grown cat with its two hind legs nearly severed by a steel trap, which it had dragged after it from the spot where it had been caught.

"By the time I had released the animal, Mr. Standridge came up, and we both decided, as it was so terribly lacerated, to put the cat out its misery at once, and I did so by dashing its head against the fence.

"The deceased then hurried back to the house, taking the trap with him, and telling me to leave the body by the road-side, so that he could bury it in the morning.

"Before he finally shouted 'Good night,' he expressed his intention of trying to find the owner of the cat, and also who had set the trap. It must have come from a distance, he said, as there were no houses near.

"As I got on to my bicycle I heard the slamming of the house door and the clatter of the chain and bolts being shot into position, and then I started straight away on the return journey.

"When I reached my lodgings I placed the bicycle in the shed, and, letting myself in with the latch-key, went up to my bedroom. It was then that I realised for the first time what a mess I was in owing to the incident of the cat. I had wiped my hands on my handkerchief, and not only that, but my cuffs were stained with the blood.

(To be continued.)

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

There is without doubt a good deal of eccentricity in the world, and judging from the post-cards I have received in connection with the "Peculiar People" competition, Scotland in this connection seems to lead the van, as it does in many other things. This is no reflection on the Land o' Cakes.

Unconventionality in dress or conduct very often (not always) implies originality of ideas and independence of opinion, two attributes not to be altogether despised.

Among the postcards sent in have been many which bear evidence of being written out of personal feeling. Thus, one Northampton shop-assistant thinks his employer the most eccentric man in the world because he recently refused to raise his salary. Quite a number of girls comment on the extraordinary characters of their lovers, who are, it would appear, lukewarm in their demonstrations of affection. "We have been engaged eighteen months, and my sweetheart has only kissed me three times," says one Chester damsel, which I quite agree betokens unwarrantable neglect on the part of the young man.

❦❦❦

The prize in this competition has been awarded to—

Mr. W. J. Ormiston,
Cameronian Cottage,
Brynhyfryd,
Swansea,

for the following:

Ronald Macmillan was, a few years ago, and may be still, a well-known figure in Inverness. His sole idea in life was to obtain recruits for the British army, and in this laudable search for food for powder, he roamed the streets of Inverness at all hours. Many and many a recruit did Ronald capture and take to the barracks, but alas! not one was ever accepted by the military authorities, for Ronald's recruits were always ragged youths and street urchins.

Ronald's garb was always that of Old Gaul. His kilt and plaid were of Cameron tartan, as became an Inverness man, for that ancient city is the depôt of the Cameron Highlanders. His glengarry, sometimes minus its tail ribbons, was never without half-a-dozen adorning feathers, and his faded scarlet tunic was brightened with a row of medals that would have put Hector Macdonald's collection into the shade had they been real, but Ronald's were of tin. A stout staff and a huge butcher's dirk completed Ronald's costume. These weapons were useful when the boys became too pressing in their attentions to Ronald as he paraded the streets in quest of recruits.

W. J. O.

❦❦❦

In addition I have decided to award stereoscopes to the following, as consolation prizes. Their efforts are printed below:

Mr. G. Stewart, Belgrave House, Littlehampton; Mr. Eric Murdoch, 8 West Adam Street, Edinburgh; Mr. E. C. Lempriere, 22 Seymour Road, Harringay, N.; Mr. J. Johnston, 32 Great Hamilton Street, Paisley, N.B.; Mr. H. E. Luck, 19 Cleveland Street, Chichester; Mr. A. R. Hutton, 2 Lapage Street, Bradford, Yorks.

About the most peculiar person I ever heard of is the "old miller of Highdown." He lived all his life on the top of a hill over Worthing, and was seldom seen by anybody. It is said he did all his work during the night and slept during the day. He was exceedingly eccentric, and had his coffin kept under his bed on wheels, and every day he would drag it out and put his clothes in it. But the most peculiar ideas of this gentleman are particularly funny: he requested that he should be put straight into his coffin directly he was dead, and buried upside down, as he always said, that when the world came to an end, it would turn upside down, and then he would be on his feet. This was fully carried out, and his grave (a large square stone railed in) can now be seen on the side of Highdown Hill, under some trees which he is supposed to have planted himself.

G. S.

❦❦❦

"Mousey Fiddle," as he is locally nicknamed, makes a living by killing mice, and his methods are "peculiarly" peculiar. Everybody knows that mice are particularly fond of music, especially the fiddle. Now, wherever these pests become numerous and destructive, "Mousey Fiddle's" services are called into requisition. Night is the time he generally goes to battle. He plants himself near the mice runs, strikes up with his mouth some lively tune, and at intervals puts in the squeaking twitter peculiar to mice. In a short time the mice are running from their hiding-places as if drawn by a loadstone, and "Mousey Fiddle" is literally surrounded. His patent destructive powder does the rest. By way of versatility he can execute a step dance, an Irish jig, or a Scottish sword dance by the use of two of his left hand fingers.

E. M.

❦❦❦

The queerest man I ever met was Frederick W. Jones,
In height six feet, he always spoke in high falsetto tones;
Six fingers had he on each hand, six toes upon each foot,
And though his beard was white as snow, his hair was black as soot.
When stirred by anger, he would move his scalp and ears, and crack
His finger-joints unceasingly, and bend his digits back.
A strange accomplishment had he—he'd place upon the tip
Of his snub nose a penny, and remove it with his lip.
In life he never told the truth, if he a lie could frame.
Though in his grave he lies quite still he still lies all the same.

E. C. L.

In the West of Scotland a race meeting, market, or fair, was not complete without Heather Jock. With his green swallow-tailed coat, with 365 buttons, made of different kinds of metal; his crown made of heather, with fifty-two small bells; his knee-breeches, with twelve pearl buttons, denoting the number of months, weeks and days of the year, he would dance and sing, to the great amusement of the youngsters, not forgetting some of the oldsters.

J. J.

❦❦❦

Possibly a number of the Border readers of *Short Stories* will remember the gentleman who is referred to in the following—a well-known landowner in the South of Scotland. He had one peculiarity, with regard to which he was parsimony personified—the humble but necessary necktie.

One day one of his tenants, George Ransome, called on him about some fencing on his farm which had got into a bad state, but to all his arguments the laird proved obdurate.

"Well, sir," said the wily George at length, "we'll let that lie. By the way, I was north to Edinburgh the other day, and got some very bonny neckties. Would you do me the honour of accepting two or three?"

"Man, Ransome," said the laird, "that's far too good of you, but—well, yes, I'll take them, thank you."

"I'll send them over to-morrow," said George, "and I think that's all my business to-day. Good morning, sir."

"Wait a minute, George," said the laird. "About that fencing—is it really so bad?"

"Oh, it might be worse," was the answer. "I believe it'll do a bit yet."

"But we canna hae things gaun wrang," said the laird, dropping into the Doric, as he did when well pleased. "I'll send a man to see aboot it the morn."

And he did.

A. R. H.

❦❦❦

The most peculiar man I know is a gentleman of independent means living on the Sussex coast.

The first thing every morning, no matter the weather, he walks on to the beach carrying a tumbler half full of whisky, which he fills up with sea-water gathered in a glass beaker.

This mixture of sea-water and whisky he drinks then and there with a great gusto. He ascribes all manner of medicinal virtues to this peculiar drink, and certainly he is the picture of health.

The same individual also soaks his tobacco with sea water, and redries it before he considers the weed is fit to smoke.

L. H. E.

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5	Cash Prizes, £25 each	125	0
10	Gents' Bicycles (free wheels), £17 17s. each	178	10
10	Ladies' Bicycles (free wheels), £17 17s. each	178	10
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40	Cash Prizes, £5 each	200	0
100	Dinner Services, £2 10s. per set	250	0
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400	Ladies' Hatboxes, £1 each	400	0
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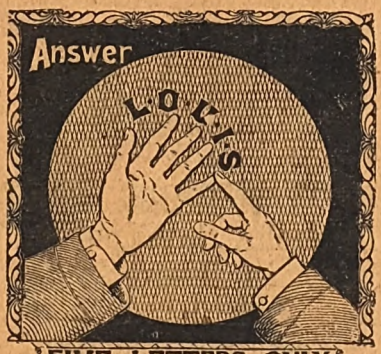

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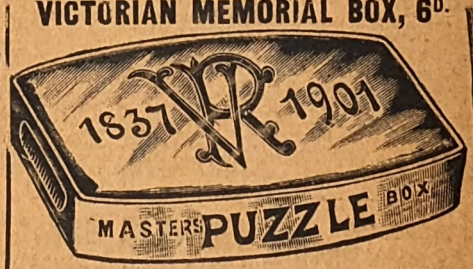

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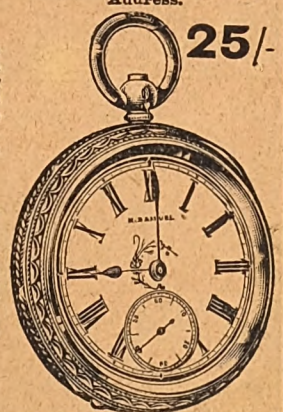

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 645.] For the Week Ending May 11th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

A Keeper of Secrets

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Being Days in the Professional Life of the late Mr. Hugo Pontifex, the Famous West-end Solicitor.

To those who had only met him casually in Society, the late Mr. Pontifex was a good-tempered mystery. Bluff, handsome, and, in spite of his middle-age, a little of a dandy, he seemed the last man in the world to deserve his reputation, which was that of the keenest, most audacious, and unerring of family lawyers. Fair-haired, and powerful as an athlete, his striking appearance was increased by his eyes, one of which was grey and one blue.

In reality, however, Hugo Pontifex had a wide and almost exclusively aristocratic practice. He seldom briefed a barrister, seldom set foot in a court of justice, but single handed he hunted down, captured, and safely buried mystery after mystery of terrible import to Mayfair and Belgravia.

An expert in st angling scandal, he lived a life of enthralling interest, and died a rich man. When his executors went through his papers they found nothing to satisfy their curiosity, though plenty to excite it. Hugo Pontifex knew the value of fire—and the dangers of ink. But from time to time he related to the writer, who enjoyed a certain measure of his confidence, the incidents which form the basis of the following stories. In speaking of these strange fragments of drama, Mr. Pontifex himself employed fictitious names, the present author being left to guess vainly at the identity of the genuine actors.

THE MEANING OF THE MIDGET MIRROR.

WHEN Sir Rupert Dane, baronet, of Warwickshire and London—having been duly announced by the deaf clerk—stalked into the presence of Mr. Pontifex, the solicitor perceived that he had before him a good-looking, well-dressed, and dejected young Briton.

The new comer responded, with a curt nod and a heavy sigh, to Mr. Pontifex's formal salutation. Then, feeling in one of his vest-pockets, he got out a screw of tissue-paper, untwisted it, and produced a tiny article, flat and glittering. He laid it in a brown palm and extended it towards the lawyer.

Hugo Pontifex bent to examine the trifle. "A fragment of some mirror, is it not?" he asked, smiling, in spite of himself, at the dismal importance of his client's bearing.

"No fragment," said Rupert Dane, deliberately; "but a perfect whole. And a mirror of excellent quality you will find it."

"What," inquired the solicitor, "may be its precise significance?"

For reply the baronet drew forth a meerschaum cigar-holder, ornamented by a coiled dragon of the same material. Into the opening of this he thrust the diminutive mirror, adjusting it carefully at an angle.

"The holder is mine," said Rupert Dane; "a score of my acquaintances would swear to it. Last night I extracted from it that wicked little contrivance, which the father of my betrothed wife had seen and interpreted. Together, Mr. Pontifex, the cigar-holder and the mirror form a cardsharper's assistant of the most perfect kind."

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Hugo Pontifex picked up the meerschaum mouthpiece and studied it.

"The operator," explained the youthful baronet, dejectedly, "allows the combination to lie on the table at his elbow and when he deals, passes the cards over it in such a manner that their downward faces are reflected in the screened glass. Thus he is kept informed of the hands of all the other players."

The solicitor nodded; he was turning the carved meerschaum to and from the light, investigating the powers of the hidden mirror.

"As a result of the mysterious introduction of the accursed thing into my cigar-holder," added Sir Rupert, bitterly; "I am no longer the affianced husband of the only woman I shall ever love, but an outcast from her society, doomed not to approach her again under penalty of instant exposure. Colonel Heathcote Anderson is a man of his word; if you cannot help me, Mr. Pontifex, I have seen Olive Anderson for the last time."

Mr. Pontifex sat down in his swivel-chair, still pondering the ingenious device passed to him by Rupert Dane.

"What caused Colonel Anderson," he said, "to investigate your cigar-holder so minutely?"

"Someone had suggested to him that I had been cheating," answered the baronet; "who his informant was he would not reveal. He said that he was bound by a promise. I have been staying with a party on Anderson's yacht, the *Sylph*, at Cowes. We played cards and, to be frank, for highish stakes. I admit I

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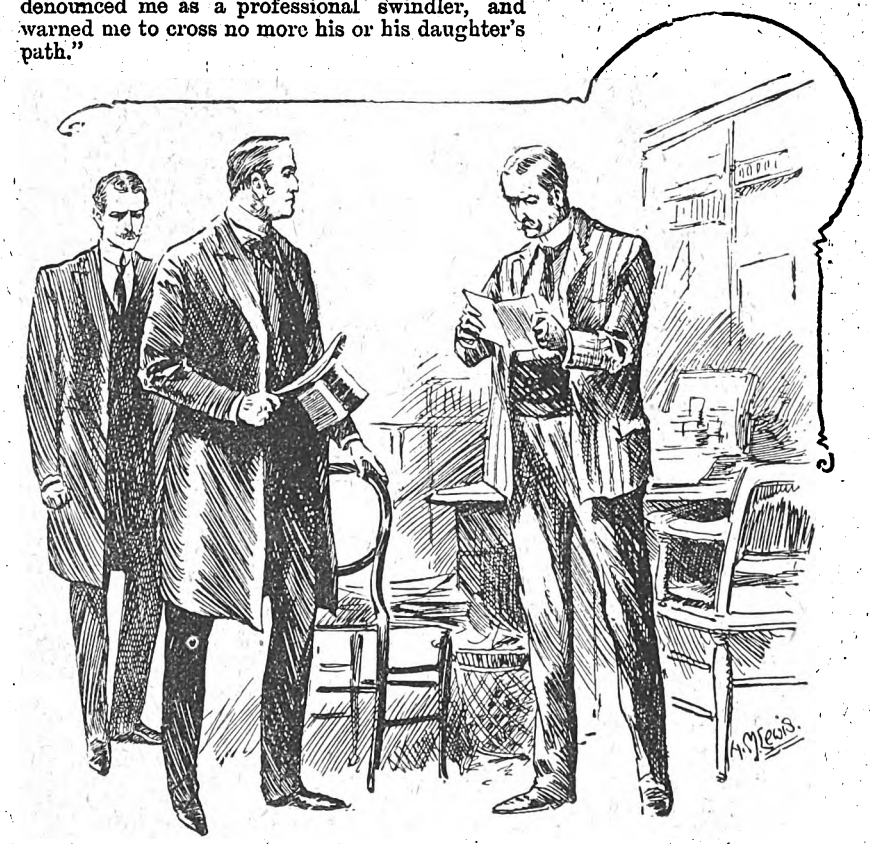
was lucky, yet so were others. But in any event, Anderson considered that my possession of the affair you are analyzing proved my guilt."

"Colonel Anderson evidently had been told what to seek for," observed Hugo Pontifex, opening a shallow drawer in his writing-table, and picking up from it a pair of tweezers.

"Undoubtedly," rejoined Sir Rupert, "nor did he disguise the fact. His ostensible excuse for borrowing my cigar-holder—he had visited me privately in my cabin for the purpose—was that he had a wager to decide as to the form of the dragon upon it. Once the holder was in his possession, he showed me the contents, denounced me as a professional swindler, and warned me to cross no more his or his daughter's path."



The gallant officer's anger faded as he read it.

The baronet leant forward to follow the lawyer's proceeding. Mr. Pontifex, seizing the mirror with the delicate pliers, had pulled it out. A gold locket hung at Hugo Pontifex's watch chain; he unclasped it, pushed a spring, and a powerful magnifying lens sprang to sight. The solicitor scrutinized by its aid the interior of the meerschaum tube.

"Do you," he queried, abstractedly, "do you suspect any particular person of playing you this trick?"

Rupert Dane pondered.

"I cannot honestly say that I do," he owned, "Anderson is the best fellow alive and the remainder of the men aboard were decent enough. They were merely acquaintances and could have no possible grudge against me."

Mr. Pontifex restored his lens to its customary position, tossed the tweezers on to the table and deposited, beside the slender tool, the meerschaum tube and the mirror—which might have been hidden beneath a threepenny bit, so small was it.

"Any ladies on the *Sylph*?" he demanded.

The baronet coloured.

"Miss Anderson," he said, "and Mrs. Joyce, a pretty widow, Anderson's sister-in-law. She was practically both hostess and chaperon—Anderson's wife died several years ago."

Hugo Pontifex twisted his sapphire ring and bent his bushy brows.

"Why conceal from me, Sir Rupert," he observed, with startling directness, "that you are guilty?"

Rupert Dane stared at the lawyer, aghast; Mr. Pontifex's grim features lost their severity.

"My apologies," said the solicitor laughing, "but I had to make sure—your expression was perfectly satisfactory; surprise is the most difficult emotion in the world to counterfeit."

The baronet breathed freely.

"For a second," he admitted, "I feared you were in earnest; the evidence, I feel, is scarcely less than damning."

"Not at all," objected Hugo Pontifex; "the evidence—providing that you have suppressed nothing—is below contempt. Were you in straits for money, or a habitual gambler for large sums, it would not be so trivial as it appears. But, having been engaged to Miss Anderson, I calculate that her father would have required proofs of your solvency, except, indeed, the engagement were secret."

"It had not, so far, been made public," qualified Rupert Dane, "but Colonel Anderson was aware of it, and approved."

Mr. Pontifex swung himself meditatively in his poised swivel-chair; the lines of profound thought stamped themselves upon his keen visage.

"Answer me scrupulously this question, Sir Rupert," he said. "Had there been the least friction between yourself and any person on board the *Sylph*, no matter at what period of your acquaintance with them or what the reason for the misunderstanding."

The baronet hesitated. "If I must reply categorically," he faltered; "I will, though I cannot see that my quarrel with Mrs. Joyce has the slightest bearing on the subject."

"Pardon my stipulating, Sir Rupert," commented Mr. Pontifex; "that I am judge on the point to which you refer."

Rupert Dane fidgeted uneasily; "I—I had flirted with

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Mrs. Joyce," he said; "before I fell in love with Olive, and I—I fear she had grown to care for me. Not till she met me on the *Sylph* last week did she learn that I was engaged and to Olive Anderson. She treated me to a scene the next day, and in that sense I grant I quarrelled with her. But you will see that my breach with her does not affect my present beastly mess."

Mr. Pontifex touched the bell at his elbow.

"Send to the Albany for my bag," he ordered the clerk. "Sir Rupert," he supplemented, "you must invite me to Cowes and the *Sylph*. Assure Colonel Anderson that you are innocent, and I have travelled to the Isle of Wight to prove you so. He should know me by reputation, but I will provide myself with a note of introduction that will conciliate him. That is, if he be the Heathcote Anderson that fought so gallantly as a lieutenant at Tel-el-Kebir."

"He is," assented Sir Rupert, "and as sturdy a hero as ever. I would sacrifice ten years of my existence to win back his respect."

The solicitor glanced at his hunter.

"Eleven o'clock," he said; "I will stroll round to the Army and Navy and ask Lord Logan to recommend me to the Colonel's affections—they were brothers-in-arms in Africa. Meet me at Victoria at 1.40, we will catch the 1.45. It reaches Cowes at 5.35."

Rupert Dane grasped the lawyer's firm fingers.

"You are a prince of solicitors, Mr. Pontifex," he cried; "do with me as you will."

Hugo Pontifex laughed—he was never happier than when removing some obstacle that kept a couple of youthful souls apart. Donning his immaculate "silk," he bade his client *au revoir* and walked down St. James' Street and Pall Mall to the famous service club. A stalwart, grey-haired soldier—the newest and cleverest addition to the General Staff—greeted him warmly and scribbled him the required missive.

Mr. Pontifex bore it off in triumph, lunched, collected a kit-bag from his office, not forgetting the mirror and the meerschaum holder, changed his "frock" for a morning coat, and drove off to Victoria.

A glorious afternoon was yellowing to its close when Sir Rupert Dane and he were crossing the Solent in a shore-boat towards the trim white hull of Colonel Anderson's luxurious steam yacht, the *Sylph*.

As they mounted the brass-railed accommodation ladder, the lawyer noticed, strolling upon the snowy deck of the *Sylph*, a plump and extremely piquant brunette, in a smart yachting costume of blue serge and white piqué.

By her dawdled a tall and rather lean cavalier, whose black hair, cut in a French mode, and tightly-waxed moustache, bespoke the foreigner as plainly as his garb and cold grey eye indicated the Englishman.

"That is Mrs. Joyce," whispered Rupert Dane, "her companion is Lucian Reece, a cosmopolitan, Anglo-Saxon and a hard nut to crack."

Hugo Pontifex scrutinized them acutely; the glances of the couple had fallen upon the young baronet with a species of astonishment that brought a singular shrewdness into the face of each.

He lingered to survey them a moment and then suffered Sir Rupert to lead him to Colonel Anderson's state room.

On the way thither they encountered a lovely girl, who, clad in a fluttering confection of chiffon, was reclining on a wicker-lounge.

"I fear, Mrs. Joyce, she is as heartless as she is handsome."

She rose hastily.

"Rupert!" she exclaimed, and checked herself on realizing that the baronet was not alone.

Mr. Pontifex moved a few paces off—soon Rupert Dane joined him, biting a nervous lip and struggling to assume an indifferent demeanour.

Hugo Pontifex sympathetically ignored his agitation.

The baronet and the lawyer entered the Colonel's cramped cabin. Its occupant turned from an escritoire to stare at the intruders.

Mr. Pontifex stepped in front of Sir Rupert, unfolded his errand with a provoking calmness, and ended by presenting Lord Logan's note to the indignant Colonel. That gallant officer's anger faded as he read it.

"Sir," he said stiffly; "I cannot but welcome anyone

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of whom my friend Logan speaks in such terms. Pray allow me to offer you the hospitalities of the *Sylph*. As for your—your client, I will say nothing of him until you can make your promised revelations. Since he may be necessary to your project, whatever that is, he will, of course stay on board. I insist, though, on his not communicating with my daughter. I have not believed it advisable to inform her of—of his real character."

"I accept that proviso, for Sir Rupert," intimated the solicitor, quickly; "when I am able to request a further confidential interview with you, Colonel Anderson, it will be to persuade you of his entire innocence." And, taking the baronet by the arm, he drew him out upon the deck of the *Sylph*.

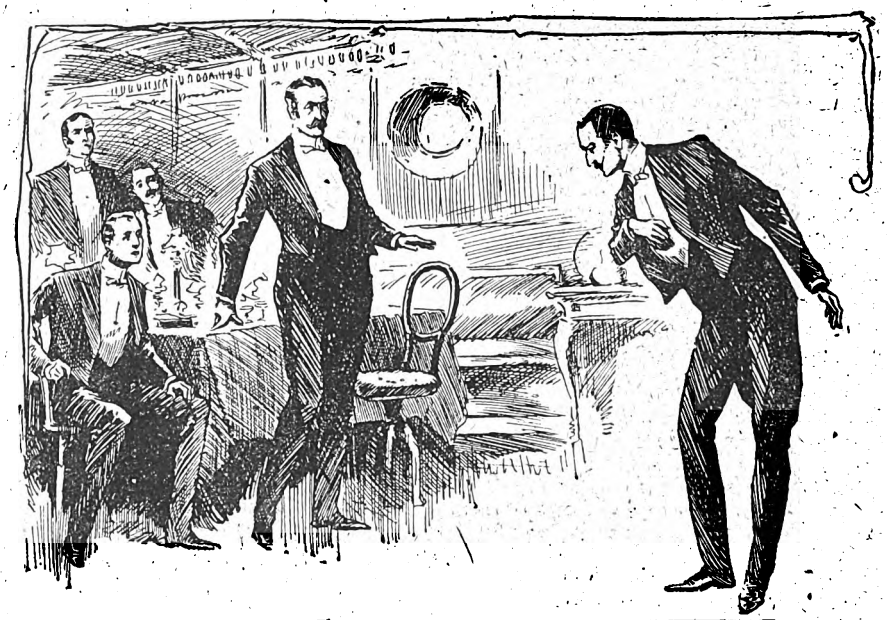
"Make me acquainted with the lady by the binnacle," he said to his client.

"Mrs. Joyce?" inquired Rupert Dane, flushing.

The lawyer nodded, smilingly, and Sir Rupert walked over to where the widow was engrossed with her dark-haired escort.

"Excuse me, Mr. Reece," he observed, raising his hat, "but I want, if she will permit me, to introduce a friend to Mrs. Joyce."

Lucian Reece bowed and left them—Hugo Pontifex had followed upon the baronet's heels. In a surprisingly brief space of time he was chatting familiarly with the coquettish brunette; at a covert sign from the lawyer, Rupert Dane also abandoned the neighbourhood of the binnacle, and Mr. Pontifex had the plump little widow to himself. Not far away, the girl in the white chiffon was gazing disconsolately over the yacht's counter from her cushioned lounge.



"Colonel Anderson, my acknowledgements for a delightful holiday."

"That beautiful creature is Miss Anderson, is she not?" asked Hugo Pontifex, suddenly. Mrs. Joyce answered in the affirmative, and Mr. Pontifex caught the imperceptible curl of her lip.

"I fancied so," said the solicitor, "from her proud, statuesque style, I fear, Mrs. Joyce, she is as heartless as she is handsome. But perhaps I am biassed; she has treated poor Dane very badly."

The widow looked at him; to Mr. Pontifex's piercing vision there was a glimmer of feeling in her bold, hazel orbs.

"I don't know why I should mention the business to you," he continued, with a skilful affectation of simplicity, "but from something Dane said to me I imagined that you had once been a friend of his—I am sure, a loyal one."

A sort of suppressed amusement seemed to twitch at Mrs. Joyce's red and crafty mouth.

"An absurd imputation on Dane's honour," pursued the lawyer, "a rumour that any true woman would have dismissed with scorn, was sufficient to demonstrate the extent of Miss Anderson's affection. Dane was so indignant at her being able to credit such an allegation that he consented willingly to break off the proposed marriage. We are here now—I am a legal chum of Dane's—to cancel formally a trust-deed that had been drawn up in anticipation of it. Dane is going to South Africa."

Mrs. Joyce started, and her cheeks dyed themselves crimson. Hugo Pontifex contemplated her slyly.

"He does not regret Miss Anderson," said the solicitor; "her callousness and credulity have effectively cured him of his passion for her, but socially he is ruined by the rumour I have described. Especially as a mysterious chance apparently lends it proof."

The widow's foot tapped the deck irresolutely. "Cannot he be induced to live down the report?" she queried.

"Impossible," asserted Hugo Pontifex; "unless Colonel Anderson should be led to apologize for having entertained it—Dane is the last to seek a vindication by the Courts. He is the subject of a despicable trick (which I happen to comprehend) but its author has successfully hidden his identity. No, there is nothing save Africa for Rupert Dane—Africa and perpetual exile."

Mrs. Joyce was biting her handkerchief and her bosom heaved. "Mr. Pontifex," she murmured; "there is a person on board who—who has a grudge against Sir Rupert; he—he might—"

"You can trust me," said the lawyer, softly; "you shall not be compromised in any degree, Dane only shall be told of your attempt to serve him. The—the name of Dane's probable enemy is—"

"Is Lucian Reece!" faltered Mrs. Joyce; "but, oh, Mr. Pontifex, not a word of my hint." A metallic sound broke in on the last of her sentence.

"Madam, I am an abyss," said Hugo Pontifex; "and that, I conclude, is the dressing gong. A thousand thanks; we shall meet at dinner."

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He strode forward, found the steward, and was piloted to his cabin. Twenty minutes later he took his place in the luxurious dining saloon of the *Sylph*. The balance of the yacht party had returned from the shore, and brown skins and hearty laughter testified to the high spirits of the Colonel's bachelor guests.

Olive Anderson was seated opposite to Mr. Pontifex, by her the lean form and hawk-like profile of Lucian Reece. The solicitor felt profoundly grateful that Rupert Dane sat in the same line; the lovers could not exchange any more of those pathetic glances that had passed between them on deck. Had they done so it might have forced Mrs. Joyce to doubt the baronet's "cure."

Lucian Reece absorbed a great deal of the solicitor's attention. He was a spruce, hard-favoured, self-possessed citizen of the world, somewhat of the "bad egg" about him, yet, not an ill-tempered or a malignant type. Mr. Pontifex carried on a closely argued train of meditation as he ate his meal and gossipped with the men in his vicinity.

When the two ladies had withdrawn and the male diners had settled themselves to enjoy the pleasures of the weed, Hugo Pontifex noticed—with a throb of his stern pulses—that Lucian Reece was using a fat cigar-holder, of clouded amber, and silver mounted. The solicitor's muscles ached to stretch athwart the table and snatch it from its owner's hand. But he controlled himself, impatiently.

At length Lucian Reece laid the cigar-holder beside his plate and began to cut a fresh Havanna. In a twinkling Mr. Pontifex had reached over and snapped up the short tube. Its proprietor made a motion as if to retain it, but arrested himself with a covert sneer.

Hugo Pontifex detached the locket from his watch-chain, pushed out the lens, and elevating it calmly, examined the interior of the amber funnel.

"Eureka!" cried the solicitor, rising; "Colonel Anderson, I promised not to ask you for another private interview until I was ready to convince you of a particular fact. May I dispense with that privacy and make my statement in the presence of your guests?"

The diners were staring bewilderedly at Mr. Pontifex; Lucian Reece had thrust back his chair out of the startled circle. The lawyer took the permission of his host for granted.

"Several days since, gentlemen," commenced the lawyer; "Colonel Anderson was approached by a person, whose individuality he refused to disclose, with the suggestion that Sir Rupert Dane had been cheating at cards, during games played recently on board this yacht. The proof was to be the discovery of a minute mirror, arranged in the orifice of Sir Rupert's cigar-holder, so as to betray to him, when dealing, the nature of the cards dealt. That mirror was found, and, as a consequence, Sir Rupert ceased to be a guest on the *Sylph*, and his engagement with Miss Anderson was dissolved."

A sigh of interest ran through the listeners.

"Just now," added Mr. Pontifex, "I inspected, by a microscopic lens, the opening of a cigar-holder belonging to Mr. Lucian Reece. I discerned in it two grooves, neatly gouged and adapted to receive the mirror which I produce, and which was found in Sir Rupert's holder when examined by Colonel Anderson."

He got out the midget reflector and slipped it into the amber mouthpiece.

"I expected that," he said; "it's too small, having been ground down by an amateur, as the edges, slightly splintered under the operation, betray. Were it a fraction larger it would fit the channels prepared for it. Those in Sir Rupert's smaller holder are clumsy and ragged, and bear traces of their hasty manufacture. Do you follow me, Colonel Anderson?"

"You astound us, Mr. Pontifex," gasped his host; "Mr. Reece, have you any explanation? I feel compelled, in the circumstances, to withdraw my pledge of secrecy, and to admit that it was you who accused Sir Rupert of foul play."

Lucian Reece stood up, laughing.

"None whatever," he said. "Mr. Pontifex is a miracle and I am, undoubtedly, the sinner. The mirror was removed from my own holder—in combination with which it has won me a moderate amount per annum—and fitted to Sir Rupert's. To be candid, I bore him no malice myself—but let us not go into the embarrassing problem of motive. Colonel Anderson, my acknowledgments for a delightful holiday; Mr. Pontifex, my humble congratulations. Gentlemen all, farewell—you would not wish me to say *au revoir*."

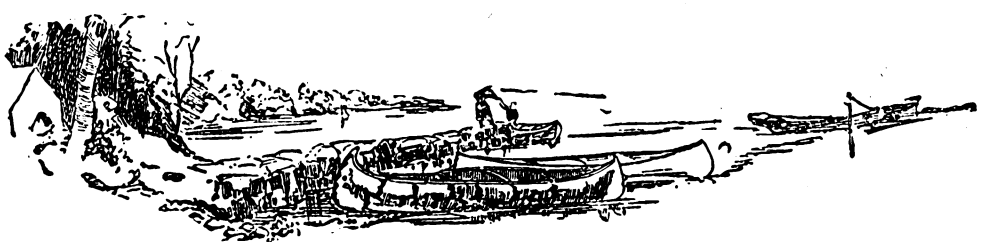
And, still laughing, he marched to the door of the saloon and disappeared. An hour subsequently, the splash of oars in the waters of the Cowes roadstead announced his departure from the *Sylph*.

* * * * *

On the ensuing day, Mr. Pontifex perused this characteristic epistle from the man he had so brilliantly unmasked.

> Sir,—I take you to be a person who can tolerate a straightforward rogue. I am a rogue, this will convince you that I can be straightforward. I desired nothing worse than to cheat Dane out of a few sovereigns at nap or écarté. My attempt to ruin him was dictated by Mrs. Joyce, whom I met in India, and who knows more of my past than I should care for her to proclaim. She ordered me to dish Sir Rupert with the Colonel, and I obeyed. Among those, however, who rejoice at your surprising checkmate is yours sincerely,
>
> LUCIAN REECE.

It is surely not necessary to observe that Sir Rupert Dane received his apology from Colonel Heathcote Anderson, and that lace and orange-blossoms became Lady Dane excellently.



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SLAIN BY A FAN.

THE feather fan was not exactly what we should call a fan in these days. It was more like a fire-screen, perhaps! for it was large and light, and made by a double row of short white ostrich feathers being stuck round half-a-circle of wood japanned and gilded, about three inches in diameter, and having a rather long handle.

Through a hole bored in the end of this handle, a cord of gold threads and black silk passed; and this cord was fastened together by a wonderfully beautiful tassle, into which seed pearls were looped, and little stars of gold.

To prevent the feathers getting out of shape and disengaged at their ends, very thin wire, covered with white silk, was passed between them two inches perhaps from the outer circle, and to this wire the feathers were fastened, back to back, by a little device of seed pearls on one side and a gold star on the other—such was a fan.

And such a fan Isabella of Spain, the wife of the Archduke Albert, held in her hand when she visited Rubens in his studio at Antwerp, if we may trust—and we certainly may—to history written with a painter's colours, and given to the world by the engraver's tool; such a fan belonged to women who wore ruffs like Queen Elizabeth, with modifications; and long stiff-stomachered gowns, and velvet cloaks with stiff edgings.

They, too, had puffs of fair satin and lace round their delicate wrists, and hair turned off their foreheads and kept safe in a velvet cap, which gave a happy excuse for banding their heads with gold, and such other precious things as they had power to command.

And after these things passed away, and Vandyke had told the world how point lace could show off face and neck in man and woman by lying flat, and turning over on the dress of cloth or velvet, still the feather fan was used, such as I described to you, and such as I am going to write about. It was a fan to attract anyone's attention, even the attention of a non-fan-flirting animal, even of a man like myself. I exclaimed when I saw it:

"What a fan!"

"Yes," said a sweetly grave and rather more than middle-aged lady, speaking without looking up from a manuscript which she was unrolling, all lines, and names, and figures; "yes"—giving a glance from her soft brown eyes over her spectacles—"it is the fan you see in the picture."

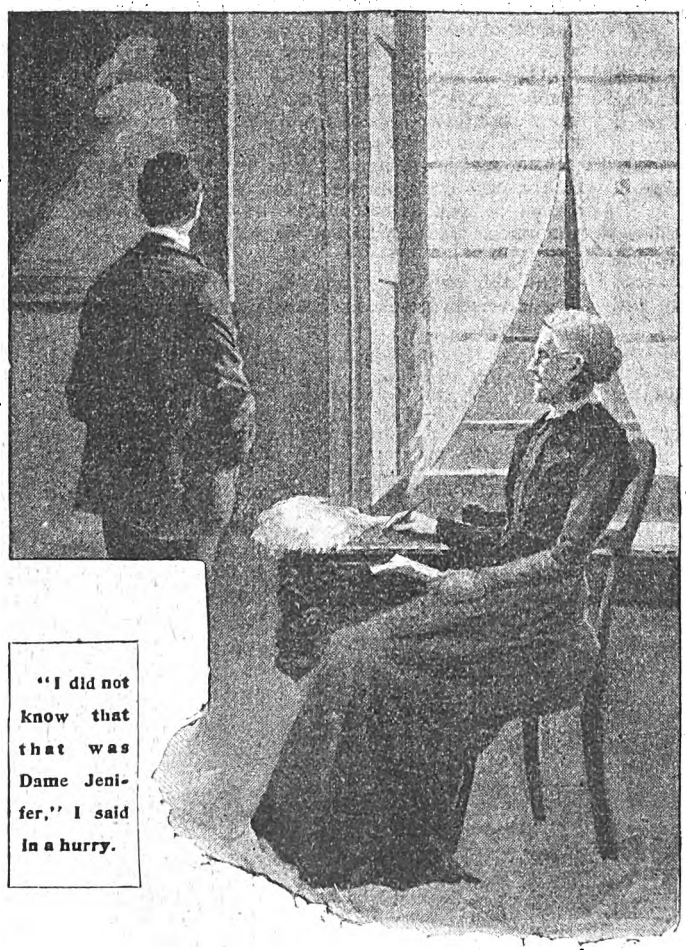
"What picture?"

"Don't you know? The picture over the couch—Dame Jenifer. She was as odd as her namesake."

Her namesake, as all the world ought to know, was no other than Guinever, the beautiful and maligned wife of King Arthur. It is a west-country name; living there, and nowhere else, I believe, like Digory for D'Egaré, that Knight of the Round Table. So fare the mighty, even in their names.

Though the lady in the spectacles was my own mother, and though I had every cause and inclination to be loving and reverential, I certainly had a great wish to do battle for the injured memory of the great hero's queen; but there lay the fan—that and the long roll of manuscript the only things on the table—there lay the fan, and it was the original of the fan in the picture, the fan that Dame Jenifer held.

It became suddenly an object of immense interest to me. We say sometimes when we take up any ancient piece of finery, preserved from past times, that we wonder who wore—who used—who bought and who treasured it? But in the case of this fan, looking so fair and light—this beautiful bauble all gold and pearls—I knew who had used it, and turning my eyes to the picture, I saw her there.



"I did not know that that was Dame Jenifer," I said in a hurry.

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"Dame Jenifer"—always when I say those words they seem to describe to my ear a very stiff sort of stuck-up personage, bristling with self-importance, tenacious of power, persecuting in temper, and of evil prophecy as to what the lives of the young around her would turn out. But when I then looked at Dame Jenifer, the eye corrected the ear. A girl of seventeen, perhaps, sat on a sofa in a costume resembling that of "Rubens' wife." The *chapeau de paille*, with its long drooping feather, threw a shadow half-way down her face, for her head was bent, till her dimpled chin rested on the jewel that fastened her green velvet dress round her throat; she held the fan in her hand in such a manner that she looked as if she beckoned you to her in a shy, half-secret way; and the eyes that looked out from under the long eyelashes were full of girlish roguery, and an inextinguishable mirth.

"I did not know that *that* was Dame Jenifer," I said in a hurry. "I thought the stiff old lady in the white muslin apron and open black silk dress was Jenifer—the picture on the staircase I mean."

"My dear boy, you will never learn their names. And yet I knew names and histories before I was your age."

"But then you had always lived here, and I am only just come."

So I persuaded my mother, who was a born antiquary, to put away the long manuscript and sit round towards the fire—it was raining piteously—and tell me all she knew of Dame Jenifer. While she is making the necessary introductory remarks, I must have some further little explanation with the reader about myself.

I was the eldest of three children, and I was twenty-five years of age. Urgent family affairs, and health rather the worse for wear under the new conditions of an Indian atmosphere, had brought me home, after a seven years' absence from England. My father was dead, and my mother had very unexpectedly become the possessor of an old property of considerable value. Her only brother, many years younger than herself, had left it to her unconditionally and unencumbered. She had two other sons, and I was to arrange with her to divide my father's property between them, and, taking her maiden name of Heniker, become heir to the old estate myself.

Up to this time we had always lived in London. I had never seen Heniker till now, though I had heard of it often enough, my mother having loved her old home with a remarkably strong affection; and now, as I have already explained, I was suddenly interested in my mother's ancestress, Dame Jenifer, the owner of the feather fan.

"Her name was Jenifer Obin, my dear boy," my mother began, taking off her spectacles and producing her knitting from a long little Indian box which I had brought back to her. "Jenifer Obin's father was a Royalist, as all the best gentry of good old Cornwall were, and he died at the battle of Broad Oak Down. My ancestor, Peter Heniker, was there. He was of this county, as you know, and lived here. But he and Jenifer's father had been dear friends, and they had promised each other that if either died in the wars of that day the other should take the child that should be left fatherless, and bringing the orphan up with their own, arrange a marriage between the two. So, by some means or other, when Sir Peter Heniker heard of Captain Obin's death he sent for Jenifer.

He died at the battle of Broad Oak Down.

"The child was ten years old. When she came she said she had pledged her word to take care of a girl called Kate Cradock, if their fathers died in battle. The double deaths had occurred, and Jenifer clamoured for Kate. Sir Peter was not the man to do any good deed in an imperfect manner, so Kate, too, was brought to this house as Jenifer's friend and companion.

"Sir Peter was a man of about forty years of age, a widower with a son of fourteen. To this son he stood pledged to give Jenifer in marriage, and the children knowing of the arrangement made no objection.

"Young Heniker, however, when Jenifer was nearly fifteen, was killed by an accident, and Jenifer and Sir Peter lamented together, and consoled with each other. The next male heir to this place—it was not entailed—was Sir Peter's nephew, the son of a younger brother who had married very early in life, and was settled in

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This was all that I got for my ten mile ride.

trade in a neighbouring seaport. This boy was Jaspar Heniker, and Sir Peter said that he was now to inherit the place and to marry the young lady.

"When Jenifer was sixteen, Kate Cradock being a year older, the discovery was made by Miss Obin that Jaspar and Kate Cradock had been making love before young Peter Heniker's death.

"She was furiously angry. Not angry with Jaspar for loving Kate, that she confessed in many of her letters to Kate herself which have been preserved, was natural enough, for they had received an equal amount of education, and Kate was very fair, and very good. But what Jenifer hated so heartily was the willingness of Jaspar to give up Kate, and marry another without loving her, just to secure to himself the place of his uncle's heir."

"Quite right," I exclaimed. "And I beg Jenifer's pardon with having confused her with the stiff old lady on the stairs."

"Take care," said my mother smiling.

I looked towards the picture. The fire played on the face and made it look absolutely alive and then the flame died out and left the figure indistinct; but I had suddenly received the impression that one day I should see Dame Jenifer and speak to her. The notion was absurd and utterly unreasonable, but nevertheless it had given me the very oddest thrill I had ever suffered.

"Why am I to 'take care?'" I asked; and I fancied my voice had changed a little.

But my mother only poked the fire once more into a blaze, and said:

"Dame Jenifer's has been the strange story of the family. I only meant to say, take care how you praise her before you hear the end."

So saying she went on with Dame Jenifer's story.

"Terribly angry she was with Jaspar, and all the more because the love between her and Kate Cradock was as true as ever; and Kate was suffering bravely and secretly, and trying to make the sacrifice so generously as not to betray the whole truth.

But the whole truth was known to Jenifer, somehow, and yet she allowed the day for her marriage to be fixed, and let Sir Peter make all the wedding preparations. They were to be married here, in the hall, which was then a sort of banqueting hall; and they stood, so the story says, on the dais—that raised floor just under the musician's gallery.

"But the night before she had had a great explanation with Kate Cradock—that night she had seen his last letter to the deserted girl, in which his love was declared in the strongest terms, and his marriage with her elf was spoken of as the hard necessity that grew out of Sir Peter's promise to his friend, her father, and he wrote that the estate would go to Jenifer's husband, who ever it might be.

"And so, somehow, a stange thing was arranged. The bridal party stood in their places about ten at night. The bride veiled—the bridesmaids veiled—they were three in number, and Jenifer had arranged their toilettes. But when Jaspar uncovered his wife's face to give her the kiss that was usual in those days, he found he had married Kate Cradock; and Jenifer, flinging back her own veil, congratulated him with all a girl's revengeful satisfaction and force.

"But it was Sir Peter who was most astonished.

"'Jenifer,' he exclaimed, 'you have done yourself a cruel wrong, perhaps. I promised your dead father that you should be mistress of Heniker. I have lost my son,

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and you have cast my nephew from you; Madam, there remains only myself!"

"And so, taking the girl's hand, and drawing a ring from his own finger, he held her, speechless, to the spot the married people had left, and with a stern voice, commanded the clergyman to begin again.

"After a pause of a moment, to allow the girl to speak if she would, the service was once more said.

"When Sir Peter had to speak, his voice was so solemn and so respectful—so full of manly loving and of gentle promise, that all of the many listeners were struck by the eloquence of its tones. They said that Jenifer looked up at him wonderingly, as he bowed his tall form towards her, and uttered the 'I will'; that their eyes met once, and that in that single glance he had conquered, snd she was won. Her voice answered him with a pathos and a meaning it had never had before—and she was mistress of Heniker, and his word was redeemed."

"Mother," I exclaimed, "I like our ancestress better than ever. I hope they were happy."

"Oh, yes," said my mother, carelessly: "they were very happy, and had a fine son who was one of my grandfathers. But there is rather an ugly story of Jaspar's anger when this son was born, and some ill-tempered wishes, which were to vex all Henikers till something impossible happened—I can't tell what."

"And this is her fan?"

I again took up the feather fan.

"Yes; Sir Peter was proud of his girl-wife, and had her picture taken; and she is looking full of healthful malice at the double success of her daring trick—is not she?"

"She is very handsome; and I am sure I must have seen someone so like her."

My mother's face was a wonder to look at when I said this. Her "Where?" had a strange anxiety in it; and when I said, "In my dreams, I suppose," she laughed, half-sadly, and turned away.

I had not been more than a week with my mother at Heniker, and I had not been in England more than a fortnight. We had lived always in London, in a good house in a pleasant situation. To this house my father had taken my dear mother when she first left Heniker to be his bride, and there all her childr n had been born.

To be the possessor of Heniker had never crossed my imagination. I had never thought of my uncle as a man likely to die, or even to live unmarried; and so, when, on reaching London, I found my mother's letter desiring me to join her in her own old home, I obeyed, with an odd feeling of change upon me, to which was not quite pleasant to feel that I had to grow accustomed. It was not the welcome I had expected.

I was young enough to expect and to picture; to desire, and even to crave after the old home, and the sweet, soft-voiced, tender-eyed mother, who had always made a darling of her first-born. I would rather have met her in the home I knew. And Heniker I felt to be something of an intrusion into my life. though it made her rich, and endowed me with expectations. It took all the first week to reconcile me to the obliteration of my picture, and to make me look my fortune in the face in a friendly manner. But about the seventh day I shook hands with Fate, and acknowledged her bounties.

Lawyers and friends agreed that we might go back to London. So we packed up sundry small treasures which were to travel with us, and sat down to spend almost our last evening in the room where the picture hung of the lady with the feather fan. As was natural, we talked again of Dame Jenifer's story; but I saw my

"Don't you dance? Come here, I want to introduce you."

mother shrunk a little from the subject. And again by the glinting firelight, as we sat gossiping, I caught the strange life-like smile of the laughing face, till I grew friendly with its beauty, and was almost cheated into thinking that the real fan and not its picture was beckoning to me from a living hand. I think this evening will always remain in my memory with a strange sensation of mystery about it. But in the morning came a letter, which made my mother determine to prolong her stay at Heniker; and I was too happy in our close reunion after a seven years' separation to wish to leave her.

* * * * *

I felt at first sorry to stay longer at Heniker. I will honestly confess that there was something distinctly uncomfortable in the picture of the lady and her feather fan.

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There, on a table in the corner of the room, lay the fan that Dame Jenifer had really held, but the whole room seemed to be inhabited by the picture of it and the fair holder.

I felt her smile when I could not see it and I am candid enough to declare that I looked round again and again when seated with my back to this haunting picture, as if to make sure that the fan was still in the place where the painter had placed it.

Dame Jenifer's eyes were always laughing at me,

She spoke good-humouredly, like a child answering.

always following me with that quizzing expression which few men are heroic enough not to mind, and, perhaps, are no greater for such heroism even if they may have attained to it.

Our visit to Heniker had begun with gloom and the friendly consolations of great fires; but now, suddenly, spring had cast aside her winter garb; the trees were bursting into leaf so quickly that from day to day we recognised a glorious change.

My wanderings with my mother were prolonged till late in the soft evenings, and it was during one of those sweet, sauntering hours, that I again talked to her of Dame Jenifer's story.

"What became of Jaspar Heniker and his wife, Kate Cradock?"

"One day you must look over the Heniker letters. They will please you, for Kate and her friend wrote pleasantly to each other. Kate had children, and one of her sons married Jenifer's only daughter. But there was no issue from that marriage. Jenifer's son was to have married one of Jaspar's girls; but he had a spirit like his mother's, I suppose, and he would not fulfil what the mothers wished for. He took his wife from a noble family, and the place has come down to us in an unbroken line."

"I should like to visit Jaspar's home."

"It was somewhere near Whitesands. I have ridden there as a girl."

"And did Henikers live there then?"

"No. It was a long, low, rambling farm-house. Mr. Heniker has let it many years. He was the last, and was in India then. Since that he married a young widow, with a daughter, I think; but he never had any children of his own, so 'Dick Heniker,' as my father used to call him, was the last of Jaspar's descendants. The house was called Whiteacres Farm. Dick was a little older than me."

"I shall ride over there to-morrow," I said.

And when the morning rose with all the promise of a summer's day, I proceeded to keep my word, ordered Jessie, my favourite, out of the Heniker stables, and after breakfast mounted, and rode away.

I reached Whiteacres at last—a farm standing amidst many inclosures, and having a few fine evergreens to shelter it. I found only one woman and a girl within. She was the farmer's wife.

Three dogs rushed out at Jessie and me, but Mrs. Brooks pacified them and then asked me what I wanted.

I told her who I was, and that I had a fancy to see Whiteacres.

"To whom does it belong?" I asked.

"It's a gentleman high in the Army, sir, who takes the rent—I can't tell his name. I know it sometimes. I think he takes it for someone who is not of age."

"A Heniker?" I asked.

"Oh, no, sir, they are all gone."

"Is there anything worth seeing in the house?"

"No sir. There was some ancient things, but they was all moved about a dozen years ago—just before we came here. There used to be more buildings out that way, but they were pulled down, and the stones used for repairs. There's old archings and window-mouldings round at the walls of the waggon-house and piggeries, sir, if you please to look at them."

This was all I got for my ten mile ride, and thinking how all things live their time and then pass away, and are forgotten, I went back to Heniker.

At last the time came for us to return to London. My mother, in her childhood's home, had been living with me through many tender memories, but she seemed to put them aside as she packed up to go away, and in London she was all brightness, life, and activity, and as proud

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of her sons as they were happy in their mother. The weather was radiantly bright, and our lives were as full of as much enjoyment as life ever yields, and then there came an event.

My mother's friend, Mrs. Chester, had come to London to get dresses and make arrangements for a fancy ball which she was going to give at their home in Hampshire.

Two daughters had come to London with her, and my brothers were upon me.

"Now, Henikers, which are you going to marry?"

To marry either of the Misses Chester did not appear a particularly easy thing to do; they were very grand personages, and kept me at a considerable distance, until I was discovered to have a ready pencil for drawing dressed-up figures, and a good fortune awaiting in broad acres. By degrees—knowledge having made these advances—we became acquainted, and on familiar terms, and engaged to dance certain dances at the coming ball

We all went to Shortlands; and the night after our arrival were all in the ball-room.

Regimentals had been voted sufficiently brilliant dresses for military men, so I was provided with a costume.

My brothers had chosen to be attendants on my mother, who was dressed to represent some character which demanded such appendages; and in the midst of a scene far too full of sparkle for me to write about, we stood, admiring and, to some degree it is to be hoped, admired.

Next to the ball-room, which was crowded, there was another large room, and there a few of the guests, seated among high oleanders, and trained vines, and orange trees, were waiting and resting, listening to the band, and being reflected, with their surroundings, in long narrow mirrors.

I stood in the entrance of this room, and saw in a mirror towards the end, on my right, the lady with the feather fan—Dame Jenifer, looking as much alive as when her wooing and wedding took place together and at once, in the old hall in my new west country home.

I consider it no disgrace to declare thus publicly that I gazed with a breathless feeling of surprise, and a sensation so like fear, that I stood rooted to the spot, and most uncertain as to my eyesight; for on looking with determination round the room, and again at the mirror, the substance was not to be seen, and the shadow was gone.

"Don't you dance? Come here, I want to introduce you."

"Stop, Chester. There's a woman here with a feather fan."

"Fifty, I should think. Everybody has a feather fan. It belongs to a fancy dress."

"No, no; not this fea her fan—let's find her."

"Nonsense! Won't you dance——"

"Only with the women who have feather fans—there she is again! Now—flesh and blood, I declare! Now, Chester are you mad? What are you staring about? She s handsomer than Dame Jenifer a thousand times; and I'll get to the bottom of this, if it's my grandmother's ghost in good earnest."

"Miss Clayton," said Chester, who had been dragged by me across the room, forcibly, "if you are not afraid of a lunatic—he is a great friend of mine!"

She burst int a low musical laugh, I felt sure she had seen my start of astonishment reflected in the looking-glass.

"This," said Chester, forgetting my change of name, "this is Alfred Pelham — Captain Pelham, I mean, I beg your pardon. He wishes to have the honour of——"

"Talking to Miss Clayton about her dress and her feather fan," I said, interrupting my friend. And then all three indulged in a laugh, and Chester walked away to leave us to our mysteries. Upon which Miss Clayton and I sat down, for I was far too much in earnest for dancing. "Now, Miss Clayton, what made you appear here in that dress?"

"I chose it because I liked it. I made it with my own hands, helped by my aunt, Lady Ross, and her clever maid."

She spoke good-humouredly, like a child answering questions.

"Forgive me for keeping to my question. What made you choose it."

"I have, at my uncle's house, a coloured sketch of a lady on a sofa, with this sort of fan in her hand. She is not a very laudable lady, for we used to say that she cheated us out of a good inheritance by marrying the uncle instead of the heir. And so there was an evil saying that those who inherited from her should never prosper till the two lines were united. But there are no men Henikers left in the world now, and I have dressed myself like the old picture, with no evil feelings in my heart, but a moderate complacency only, which I believe not to be criminal."

She made this little speech with the drollest affectation of candour, and the glance of her pretty eyes was just Dame Jenifer's over again.

I said:

"And were the families never united?"

"Oh, yes, Dame Jenifer's daughter married her old lover's son, and she brought the picture into the house. But that was no use. Dame Jenifer's son carried on the elder line, and the old gossips meant that the two lines should become one."

"I have stud ed the pedigree, Miss Clayton. I thought Richard Heniker, of Whiteacres, died without children. Allow me to ask—Who are you?"

"Richard Heniker died in India. But he married his cousin, my mother, a widow—Mrs. Clayton. So when my stepfather, who was also my cousin, died, I was the only Heniker left in the world, and I was given to the guardianship of Sir James Ross, because his wife was my father's sister."

"And is Whiteacres yours?"

"Yes."

She rose up, and I took her across the room to Lady Ross. She introduced me as Captain Pelham, and I said, under the protection of Lady Ross' presence:

"I was called Pelham; but I had to take the name of Heniker last week."

And then Lady Ross, who had learnt all about it, was so glad to know me. and while Mary Clayton coloured crimson, I felt that the aunt had marked me down as "eligible."

I danced with Mary Clayton. I talked of Heniker, my beautiful mother, and Dame Jenifer's portrait. I introduced my brothers to her, and we set up a cousinly monopoly of the young lady, which lasted till they called her "sister," and I had brought to Heniker as its new mistress, a new edition of "the lady with the feather fan."

G. P.

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SHORT STORIES THAT MAKE YOU LAUGH

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, May 13th. Post-cards only, please. The prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. W. J. Bristow, 119 Stratford Road, Plaistow, Essex, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

HE: "If I were not in a canoe I would kiss you."
She: "Take me ashore, instantly, sir."

"IF I'm not a little more careful," observed the hen, as she removed the china egg from her nest, "I shall be laying bricks next."

HE: "How high out of water that steamer is that's coming in yonder."
She: "I suppose it's because the tide is so low."

PHOTOGRAPHER: "Excuse me, sir, but you have been sitting on your hat for the last ten minutes."
Customer (furious): "Well, why in thunder didn't you tell me before?"
Photographer: "I wished you to look pleasant, sir."

AN American visitor to Ceylon, desiring to have a bathe, asked a native to show him a place free from crocodiles. The native took him close to the mouth of the river, where the American enjoyed a refreshing dip. On coming out of the water he inquired of his guide how this particular spot happened to be free from crocodiles.
"Crocodile 'fraid of shark!" replied the Cingalese assuringly; "too many shark here!"

THERE was once a Scotch farmer famed for his strength, who was often challenged by people from all parts of the country who had heard of his reputation.
One day there arrived from London a well-known amateur pugilist. Finding the Scot working in a field, he dismounted from his horse and said:
"Friend, I have heard a great deal about you, and I have come a long way to see which of us is the better wrestler."
Without saying a word, the farmer seized him round the waist, pitched him over the hedge, and quietly resumed his work.
The pugilist slowly gathered himself together, and when fairly on his feet, the farmer asked if he had anything more to say to him.
"No," he replied, "but perhaps you would be so good as to throw me my horse."

STRANGER (to sexton): "Would you kindly sew me into a sheet?" He meant, of course, "show me into a seat."

SHE: "That was such a funny story you told me yesterday about a donkey, Mr. Griggs."
He: "Do you think so?"
She: "Yes, indeed! After this, whenever I see a donkey it will remind me of you!"

MISTRESS: "Do you think that young Policeman Keegan, who calls here so often, means business, Norah?"
The Cook (blushing): "I think he do, mum. He's begun to complain about my cooking already."

OLD INHABITANT (loafing at Cross Roads grocery): "Talkin' about crop failures, I remember a time when people had to eat up all the farm stock and then live on the fodder wot they had saved fer the cattle."
Older Inhabitant: "Huh! That's nothin'. Why, I recollect the time when provisions got so scarce that the starvin' farmers hed to go out an' shoot an amatoor sportsman fer dinner, an' then cook him with the wood from the 'Trespassers will be prosecuted' signs."

* A QUACK doctor stood on his waggon at a street corner selling his "cure all." A group of people gathered about him, and he undertook to explain to them the anatomy of the throat.
"My dear friends," he began, "perhaps you don't know it, but there are two passages that go from the back of the mouth to the stomach. One is called the œsophagus and the other is the œsophagi. Now, the solid victuals goes down the œsophagus and the liquids down the œsophagi. Over the top of the holes is a cover with a hinge in the middle, and when you swallow beefsteak the little door over the œsophagus flies open and the little door over the œsophagi drops down, and *vice versâ* when you take a drink of coffee."
This description proved too much for a farmer who stood on the edge of the crowd. Shaking with laughter, he remarked in a loud tone:
"Gosh, but those doors must go flipper-flopper when feller has bread and milk."

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The Caller: "How do you like your new doctor?"
Mrs. De Style: "Oh, he's far superior to the other one. He really thinks there is something the matter with me."

"Doctor," said the anxious woman, "isn't there a somnambulism germ? I want one for my husband if there is. He's so busy at his desk all day long that he is being ruined for the lack of exercise. I thought if we could make him walk in his sleep it wouldn't be a bad idea."

The burglar entered the author's house at midnight, and was disturbed by the awakening of the occupant of the room.

Drawing his revolver he said: "If you stir you are a dead man! I'm hunting for money!"

"Let me get up and strike a light," said the author, "and I'll hunt with you."

A story is told of a British soldier in the Transvaal. His colonel, observing him one morning wending his way to camp with a fine rooster in his arms, halted him to know if he had been stealing chickens.

"No, colonel," was the reply, "I just saw the old fellow sitting on the wall, and I ordered him to crow for old England, and he wouldn't, when I confiscated him for a rebel."

We know a man who has a mania for collecting all sorts of queer facts in history, science and so forth; but his wife has no sympathy with him in this direction.

The other evening he laid down his paper.

"That's odd," he said to her.

"What?" she inquired.

"The statement that it would take 12,000,000 years to pump the sea dry at the rate of 1,000 gallons a second."

She thought over the statement profoundly for a full minute, and then innocently asked:

"Where would they put all the water?"

In a trial at Winchester recently an amusing incident occurred through the witness, who interlarded his conversation to a great extent with "says he," or "says I," and the court could not understand what he meant.

The Judge took him in hand with the following results:

"My man, tell us exactly what passed."

"Yes, my lord, certainly. I said I would not have the pig."

"Well, what was his answer?"

"He said he had been keeping the pig for me, and that he——"

"No, stop—he did not say that. He could not have said that. He spoke in the first person."

"No, my lord, I was the third person who spoke."

"I mean this—don't bring in the third person—repeat his exact words."

"There was no third person, my lord, only him and me."

"Look here, my good fellow, he did not say he had been keeping the pig, he said, 'I have been keeping it.'"

"I assure you, my lord, there was no mention of your lordship at all. We are on two different stories, my lord; there was no third person present, and if there had been anything said about your lordship I must have heard it."

Jack: "Who is that fine-looking girl that just bowed to you?"

Tom (gloomily): "Oh, she's my sister."

Jack: "Why, old chap, I wasn't aware that you had a sister."

Tom: "I didn't know it myself until last night."

Chicago Millionaire (showing his library to distinguished novelist): "See them books?"

D. Novelist: "Yes."

C. M.: "All bound in calf, ain't they?"

D. N.: "So they are."

C. M. (proudly): "Well, sir, I killed all them calves myself."

Mother: "Johnny, you said you'd been to Sunday-school."

Johnny (with a far-away look): "Yes, mother."

Mother: "How does it happen that your hands smell fishy?"

Johnny: "I—I carried home the Sunday-school paper, an'—an' th' outside page is all about Jonah and the whale."

A good story is told of a man named William Potts, who is engaged as a window-cleaner at a certain big hotel in London.

One morning, William, instead of doing his work, was amusing himself by reading the paper, and, as bad luck would have it, the manager looked in.

"What this?" he said.

William was dumfounded.

"Pack up your things and go," said the manager.

So poor William Potts went to the office, drew the money which was owing to him, and then went upstairs and put on his Sunday clothes.

Coming down, he went to say good-bye to some of the other servants, and there he happened to run across the manager, who didn't recognise him in his best coat.

"Do you want a job?" asked the manager.

"Yes, sir," said William.

"Can you clean windows?"

"Yes, sir."

"You look a handy sort of a chap. I only gave the last man twenty-two shillings, but I'll give you twenty-five."

"Thank you, sir," said William; and in half-an-hour he was back in the same old room, cleaning the window this time, and not reading the paper.

YOUR EDITOR

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THE MOST REMARKABLE COMPETITION . . EVER DEVISED. . .

The Editor of SHORT STORIES will offer his heart and hand to one of his lady readers! He will marry her!

LOOK OUT FOR FULL PARTICULARS, WHICH WILL APPEAR SHORTLY.

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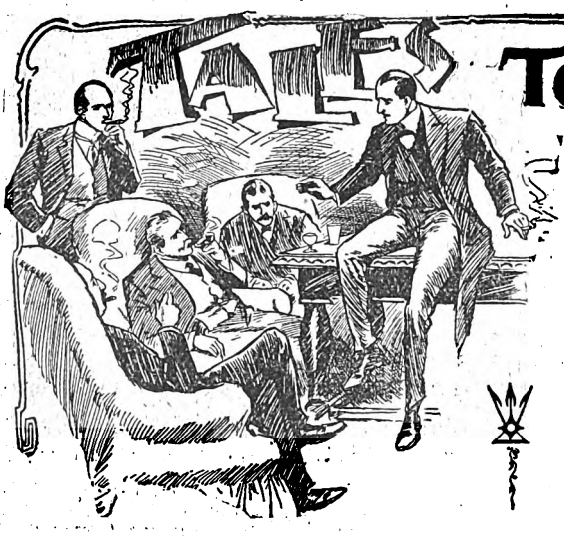

TOLD OFF DUTY.

[You probably don't know the "Stand-Easy" Club. It isn't in the directory, and you might live next door to the place for years without knowing of its existence by that name. It isn't a conventional club; there is no subscription, and there is no register of members. It is merely a room in a quiet, orderly, and select hostelry in Westminster, where, by common consent, a number of officials of all kinds meet when "off duty." There you may find detectives from Scotland Yard, near by; firemen, commissionaires, a soldier or two, and maybe a doctor from St. Thomas' Hospital or elsewhere. A motley crowd they would be if they wore their uniforms, but at the "Stand-Easy" uniforms are a rarity, "mufti" being the unwritten rule. The result is a gathering of quiet, well-behaved, and well-dressed men. Saturday night is the time when one sees the biggest muster, for then it is the custom for one member to regale the company with a story, the story being, as a rule, an account of some incident in the teller's own career.]

BOX 72.

THE SIGNALMAN'S STORY.

"It isn't often," said Joe Aldridge, one of the original members of the "Stand easy," "that a signalman's experience has anything particularly romantic or thrilling about it. It happened once in my life, however, that I was a principal actor in as terrible a tragedy as ever took place on any line of railway in the world—much less in the United Kingdom.

"That's a big order, but it's a fact (and facts, they say, are stubborn things), and as I suppose it's my turn to run the 'special' to-night, why, I'll tell the story, and leave you all to be the judges as to its worth and probability."

"One minute, Joe!" some one interrupted him, "this yarn of yours; it is a personally conducted job—no 'bogie'?"

"Nothing 'bogie' about it," said Joe, a trifle warmly, but keeping his temper, "except the wheel arrangement of the train that comes into it."

"Oh, all right! I didn't mean anything—go ahead!"

"It was when I was in charge of Box 72, in the great cutting between Eynsford and Sevenoaks.

"Every traveller on the Chatham and Dover knows this wonderful open passage clove out of the Kentish chalk. Its scarped, rugged sides (here and there touched with green), rise in some cases to fifty or sixty feet above the 'track' level, the top on either side being in many instances crowned with a tangled growth of thicket and copse.

"No. 72 signal-box was at the bend of the cutting, immediately before you sight Otford Station—maybe a mile.

"It was a lonely, eerie sort of a place, so that, somehow, I was always glad when the time came for relief.

"Harry Sargent, the other signalman, was a strange chap; morose and surly to a degree that made me sometimes to feel that I was especially lucky in seeing so little of him. Harry lived in Otford, a little, old-fashioned, out-of-the-world Kentish village, situated in the heart of the garden-county.

"I lived at Eynsford myself, and as it was a goodish step, I generally managed to get a lift up or down on one of the few trains that stopped at Otford. When I walked, which was rarely, it was along the 'six-foot' way.

"Harry Sargent was married to the prettiest girl in all that part. What Jessie Dyer could have seen in him is a mystery to me to this day. I can only put it down to the contrariness peculiar to some women, that makes them to do just the opposite to that which they ought to have done, and which it was safely expected of them that they would do.

"I am an old bachelor, and am likely to remain so, but I could quite understand and appreciate Jessie's position as Harry Sargent's wife, and by consequence sympathized with her, though unfortunately that could not do her much good, poor girl!

"Still, the most that could be said of her husband was (so far, that is, as I knew), that he undoubtedly drank more than was good for him and—made a book.

"Now, that last is a thing that I'm fair set against. Gambling, of whatever shape it be, may be a noble, spirited form of sport, (so-called), from the winner's point of view; but if Harry's might be accepted as a specimen of a betting-man's home, then am I content to go on my way, unpersuaded, and unbewitched.

"I did not know the whole truth with regard to the other till one day in the early summer of '97, when, having a day's leave, I decided to visit some old friends at Otford.

"This necessitated my being on night duty for two nights; an important fact to remember, in the light of what follows.

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"The 'Bull' inn, Otford, is a quaint old place; red-bricked, stained, weather-beaten, and—cosy.

"Feeling thirsty, the day being hot, I turned in for a glass of ale.

"The 'Bull's' parlour is furnished with a couple of enormous high old oak settles, ensconced in the depths of one of which I lazily enjoyed my beer and a smoke.

"By-and-by I was roused by the sound of voices, pitched in a low key, proceeding from the other settle.

"'And you think it can be done, then?'

"'Done! Yes! What's to prevent it? The fellow's a perfect "hogshead" for liquor, while I happen to know that he's far from being particular where £ s. d.'s in the question.'

"'And you're sure he's on to-night?'

"'Yes, sure; he's doing a fortnight's night-duty.'

"'Ah! that's all-right then, and settles the matter.'

"I can't exactly say why, but I couldn't help thinking that in some way I was concerned in this mysterious matter.

"Then I heard the last speaker's voice again.

"'The best thing, Derholt, is for you to meet me at 10.15 to-night in the cutling; a little distance the upside of Otford Station—say, just where the water-course runs down to the culvert at the side of the track. You know the place! I pointed it out to you yesterday from the top of the bank.'

"'Yes, I know, but look here, Rueth! Is this the only way we can work the job? Isn't there a——'

"'No, you fool! there isn't,' growled the other savagely. 'If you are afraid to risk it, say so, but as sure as you do, you'll have to reckon with me! for the sharer of my secret, if he turn coward and sneak, must, well—a word to the wise.'

"As yet I had seen neither of the twain, but this last utterance of one of them, told me pretty plainly what manner of men they were; and made me see, as clearly, that a desperate game was on the board, and that in some way, I was to have a hand in it.

"The scheme, whatever it was, certainly had the line for its base; and was, as certainly, to have its carrying out that night some time after half-past ten.

"The men, evidently, were under the impression that Harry Sargent would be on duty; as in the ordinary course he would have been, the description of the man they referred to fitting my relief to a tee.

"Of my temporary change of duty they were quite ignorant, and if I was to defeat a nefarious plot of any kind, it could only be by leaving them in that blissful state.

"With this end in view, I noiselessly edged myself along the settle-seat, towards the wall end of it, and managed to get down well behind the massive arm rest.

"At this moment, just when I had safely executed my manœuvre, the men rose, and came out into the room, and full into my view. It was impossible that they could see me, as I was not only hidden by the screen end of the settle, but was also well within the deep shadow of the great fireplace.

"'To-night, then, at a quarter past ten,' said Derholt.

"'Better make it ten sharp,' returned the other, 'on second thoughts, for our man may be troublesome, and need, perhaps, a little more persuading than we have calculated upon. Yes, make it ten.'

"'So be it,' and the man Derholt went out, leaving his companion, who occupied himself for the next five minutes in deliberately choosing a choice cigar from out of a handsome gold-mounted case, and preparing it for use, to his own devices.

"He was a middle-aged man of good appearance, well-dressed, and of an easy assurance of manner. From what I could see of his face, I did not favour it much, the eyes being decidedly shifty and cold, while his mouth had a hard, cruel look about the corners, not by any means pleasant to see.

"I had not so good an opportunity of studying his companion, by reason of his speedy departure, but I saw enough to give me a passably fair idea of his general personality.

"Evidently he was not on a social level if on the same moral plane with his friend Reuth, who, however great a rascal he might be, was without doubt a man of education and refinement.

"'Joe, Joe! Let me in!' It was Jessie Sargent's voice, and, sure enough, when I opened the door, there stood, or rather crouched, my mate's wife."

"Derholt—short, squat, and coarse-featured—carried his credentials in his face and bearing. Still, of the two, I should, at a pinch, be inclined to put faith in him rather than in the varnished scallywag.

"My experience has been but humble and limited, but, such as it is, it puts its finger on the educated genteel criminal as being a far more dangerous factor to deal with than the rough-and-ready 'professional' of the slums.

"But to my tale.

"His cigar lit to his satisfaction, his 'little bill' discharged, Mr. Reuth lounged nonchalantly out of the room and from the house.

"I watched him from the window saunter down the

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road, and then made the best of my way to the station to catch the 2.37 for Eynsford.

"I was due for night relief at eight o'clock, and wanted a cup of tea, and a snatch of sleep before going on duty.

"I dropped a word, while waiting for my train, with the stationmaster at Otford; but he was disposed to be-little the value of my information.

"'It's just a meetin' for private purposes,' said he, 'nothing in the world else, and they choose the line because it's quiet, I suppose. There's nothing to worry about, Aldridge; I'm willing to take the blame, if any, so make your mind easy, man.'

"But that's just what I couldn't do, and I hurried home from Eynsford Station in no enviable state of mind.

"Do you think I could sleep? No! not a wink could I get. I was becoming more and more convinced that mischief was intended with regard to some particular train.

"My brain whirled and whirled with trying to put life into my thoughts.

"Then it flashed upon me!

"There was a slow train from Sevenoaks for London, which would pass through Otford at 11.7. A quarter-of-an-hour after that (11.23, if it was to time, which it usually was), the Hastings' up-express was due to pass my box.

"It was quite clear to me now that some villainy was afoot in connection with one or other, or both of these trains.

"This idea possessed me so strongly, that, once fixed in my brain, I made short work of everything at home, and started excitedly for the cutting well before six.

"I would leave no stone unturned, to circumvent, if possible, the working-out of what I believed to be a diabolical plot. As a first step towards this end I determined, therefore, to get Sargent out of the box as early as I could, and send him home out of harm's way. I could easily effect this, as there was no regulation forbidding an early relief whatever there might be with regard to a late one.

"On reaching the box, I found Harry in anything but a sober state; and whether it was my fancy or not, he seemed to me to be disturbed at my unexpected appearance.

"'Hullo! matey! What's up? Ain't time yet for changin' guard!' (He had been in the Army.)

"'No,' I replied, 'it isn't; but I can't, somehow, sleep in the daytime; and so, feeling a bit restless, I thought I'd let you have the benefit of it, and come on.'

"'Oh! I don't mind—what d'you think!'

"'That's all-right, then!' said I, 'and you'll be able to have a jolly good long evening at home.'

"'Shall I?'—he said, with a leer, and a hiccough, 'Shall I?—don't you be too sure of that, my boy, p'raps I shall, and, maybe, p'raps I shan't.'

"'That's your business' I observed, indifferently, 'you're big enough to manage your own affairs!'

"'Of course I am!—Well; since you will have it, I'll be off. Good-night, Joe!'

"'Good-night! Harry!'

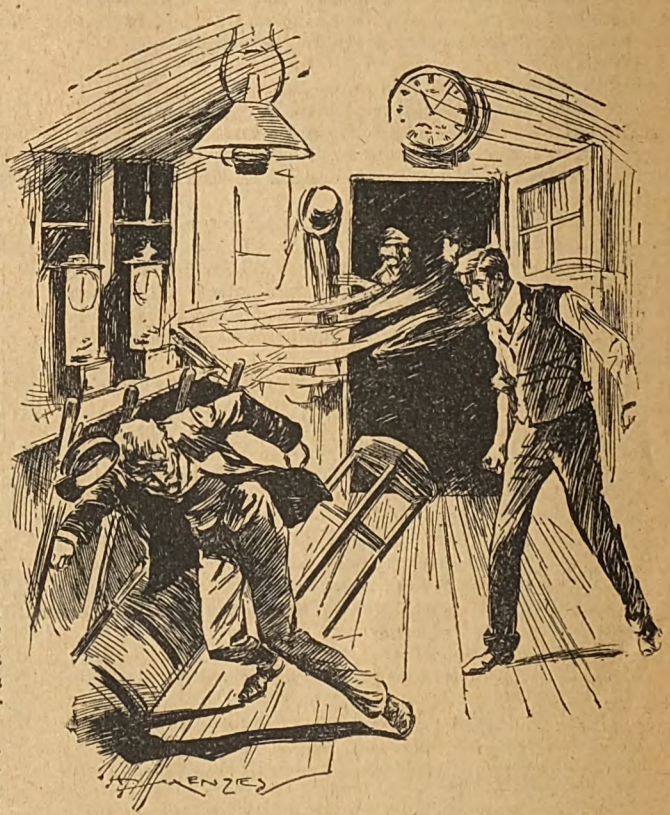
"Now, I had it all to myself.

"There were only five levers in the box, quite sufficient to work the 'in,' and 'out' signals for Otford station, and the special 'block' signals.

"There wasn't, therefore, much to do in the ordinary way, although, Otford being a junction, there was enough to keep one wide awake right through one's spell of duty.

"I did not look for any interruption till after ten o'clock, but my suspicions that somehow wouldn't be drowned kept me on the alert and watchful.

"It must have been about half past nine, when I heard what I took to be someone (a woman it seemed by the voice) calling me by name, and trying to turn the handle of the box door.



"Before we could plainly see the would-be thieves, a report rang out from the deep shadows of the open doorway, and Harry, with a cry like that of a dying lion, fell face forward in a heap among the levers."

"It was my usual practice to turn the key inside. I could, and can give no reason for this, beyond, maybe, the instinctive desire to keep out unwelcome intruders.

"'Joe, Joe! let me in! let me in!'

"It was Jessie Sargent's voice, and, sure enough, when I opened the door, there stood, or rather crouched, my mate's wife.

"The night had come over dark and wet; and she was soaked with rain; while her hair was dishevelled by the wind, that swept in fierce, snappy gusts, up the cutting.

"'Come in, Mrs. Sargent!' said I, startled to see her at such an hour, and in so woeful a plight. 'Come in! Whatever has brought you out a night like this?'

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"I put to the door as I spoke, and drew out a small stool upon which she sank, panting, and completely exhausted.

"'Now,' said I, when she seemed a trifle more collected, 'is there anything wrong?'

"'Joe,' she said, not heeding my question, but asking me another. 'Where is Harry? They tell me that he left here at twenty past six.'

"'Hasn't he been home?' I said, as soothingly as I could; though I had a strong misgiving that my precautions were doomed to failure, and that the pair of schemers had succeeded in getting hold of Harry sometime between now and the time he left me.

"'What is it, Jessie?' I said again, (I had been her playfellow in childhood, and later would have been something dearer, but—Harry came along, and I had to stand aside). 'What is it? It must be something serious to upset you in this way.'

"'It is—it is, Joe!' she wailed; and then she sobbed as if her heart would break.

"'Then tell me all about it,' I said, 'and we'll see what can be done.'

"Her tale, told in piteous fashion, only confirmed my worst fears.

"Sargent, it appears, instead of going straight home, had turned into the 'Bull,' remaining there more than half-an-hour. He must then have taken a wide circuit, for the next place where he was heard of was by the barn of Broadmead Farm, which lies on the road leading to Dunton Green.

"It was quite by accident that Jessie heard of her husband's early relief from duty (the porter on his way home from the station told her), so that it was only natural that she, knowing his failing, should be uneasy at his non-appearance at eight o'clock.

"She had nothing to tie her to the house, so determined to go in search of him.

"Jim, the porter, had said that he had heard of him at the 'Bull,' she need not therefore make any inquiries at the inn. There were two routes she could take—the one almost a straight road from the station; the other, the roundabout way by Broadmead.

"It must have been instinct that prompted her to follow the latter; for assuredly it would have been, in the ordinary course of things, the more unlikely of the two.

"By the time Jessie arrived at Broadmead barn end, it was quite dark, the rain and the wind having it all their own way.

"Up one side of the barn is a narrow path, approached by a stile, and leading back, across the fields, to Otford again.

"A few yards up this path is a lean-to shed for the shelter of cattle. The interior of this was dark as pitch; but Jessie's ear, anxiously strained to catch every echo even, detected the sound of men's voices, in fairly loud conversation, as proceeding from it.

"Crossing the stile, she crept noiselessly along by the barn side to within a yard or so of the shed.

"'It's all very well,' someone was saying, 'but this securing of young Sargent doesn't help us one bit that I can see. We've got that fellow Aldridge to tackle now, and he's a level headed customer, not so easy to bowl over, or I'm very much mistaken.'

"'Derholt!—you're an ass! You ought to know me by now I should think; and that I never call "time" to any one man, whoever he is!'

"'Oh! that's all right; but you'll find that this Aldridge is a tough one, and one that it will take us all our time to manage.'

"'Well, it's got to be done,' impatiently snarled the other, 'and all the talk in the world won't shunt me off the job. The thing's as easy as "kiss your hand." The slow train carries, as we know, the box of "five thousand in gold," from the Sevenoaks bank. The Hastings' express, by just a failure to operate the right signal lever in Box 72, smashes into it, the catastrophe being our opportunity. It's all as plain as—water.'

"'There's one thing you haven't thought of, though,' said Derholt, 'and that is, that Sargent, half-drunk as he was when he left us just now, may go back on us at the last minute, and spoil everything.'

"'I don't think he will,' said his companion. He hasn't the gumption. Besides, the pound or two he's got on account, with the prospect of the bit more he's to get when the job's done, will keep him quiet. He'd had just enough, I take it, to make him stand his ground with this Aldridge, and insist on resuming his proper duty. If he's funked it, and not gone near the place, why, there'll be nothing else except for us to tackle the "gentleman in charge."'

"'As,' said Jessie, 'I heard them moving directly after that, as if they meant to leave the shed, I quietly slipped back over the stile, and ran all the way 'till I dropped on the box steps.'

"It was now on the stroke of ten, and Sargent had not paid me the visit that he had led his rascally friends to believe that he would pay. There was every prospect, therefore, that I might expect at any moment to have to try conclusions with the two conspirators themselves.

"But I must first get rid, somehow, of Jessie. She, poor girl, must not be mixed up in any struggle that might take place, if I did my duty as I intended to do.

"Wrapping her up therefore, as well as I could, I opened the door, and helped her up the steep flight of ladder steps that scaled the chalk at the rear of my box. Once on the top, there was a seldom used path, skirting Fermer's Copse, which would bring her home in less than a quarter of an hour.

"What then happened, after that I had shut myself inside, may be told in very few words; the fewer the better, for I have no particular relish for the memories they must necessarily call up.

"It may be asked why I did not seek assistance from Otford. The answer is easy. The wire connecting my instrument with the main telegraphic current had, it was afterwards ascertained, been nefariously cut, while it was manifestly impossible for me to leave my box. That the stationmaster at Otford should contemptuously ignore my early warning was no fault of mine, so that I had nothing for it but to meet the crisis in my own person, and as best I might.

"The first intimation I had of coming trouble was about 10.45, when, having occasion to look intently through the window on to the line to see if the headlights of the Tunbridge train, then due, were visible, I saw a man's face pressed against the glass on the outside.

"I knew that my hour was come.

"In less time than it takes me to tell it there was a terrific blow on the door, which literally tore it from its hinges.

"I was provided with a revolver (for emergencies such as the present) and stood with my back to the Otford side of the box, facing the door, prepared for the inevitable onslaught.

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"But the cowards saw the weapon, I suppose, and changed their tactics, for in less than a minute a crash of glass behind me was followed by a smashing blow on the back of the head that rendered me oblivious of everything for the time being.

"As I fell, I heard in an indistinct sort of way, the Tunbridge train rush by. Mercifully, the down line was clear, so that it would reach Otford safely.

"It might naturally be supposed that, the signalman handicapped, the villains would have a free hand and a terrible train disaster certainly result. That it was not so, was due, I venture to think, under Providence, to my good constitution, and power to throw off anything short of complete disablement.

"The two men must have left me under the impression that I should probably remain unconscious for several hours. They had blocked the up line to the 11.7 Sevenoaks train, by making fast the lever. This I discovered when I came to at three minutes past eleven.

"I, of course, felt weak and nerveless, as who would not, but I managed to restore the signal to its normal position, and to clear the line.

"You see, the scoundrels had calculated that the Sevenoaks train would, on seeing the signal against her, pull up just round the curve. This would consequently prevent the driver of the Hastings' express from seeing the tail lights, and as the clever pair had provided for a quick change of signal a few seconds before the appearance of the express, the full result of such an arrangement may be readily imagined.

"But it was not to be.

"I had hardly pulled the lever when, punctual to the minute by my clock, the Sevenoaks train ran by. As I anticipated, Reuth and his confederate lost no time in seeking revenge.

"But they reckoned without their host.

"The first man to cross the threshold was neither Reuth nor Derholt. It was Sargent, who burst into the box, his eyes ablaze, his whole face aglow with passion.

"'Joe!' he cried, 'they're on you! But I'll stand by you! You shan't say I left you in the lurch. Here they are!—look out!'

"And they were.

"But the end was close at hand now.

"Before we could plainly see the would-be thieves, a report rang out from the deep shadows of the open doorway, and Harry, with a cry like that of a dying lion, fell face forward in a heap among the levers.

"What would have been my fate, had no assistance arrived, it is not difficult to conjecture. It seems that the wind set in the direction of Otford; and that the stationmaster, hearing a faint sound of pistol shots, and convinced at last that something was wrong, decided to inquire at once into the matter.

"Collecting half-a-dozen labourers from a siding, he made for my box, getting there just in time to save me and to secure Reuth and his ally.

"The worst part of the whole affair was the death of poor Harry, who succumbed an hour later. I shall never forget his wife's agony of mind. She will never be again the same woman. Her future life is buried in her husband's grave.

"Reuth, as having fired the shot (his companion proved that), paid the capital penalty; the other, curiously, died between trial and sentence.

"I took a great dislike to my old sphere of duty, and someone else now reigns in 'Box 72.'"

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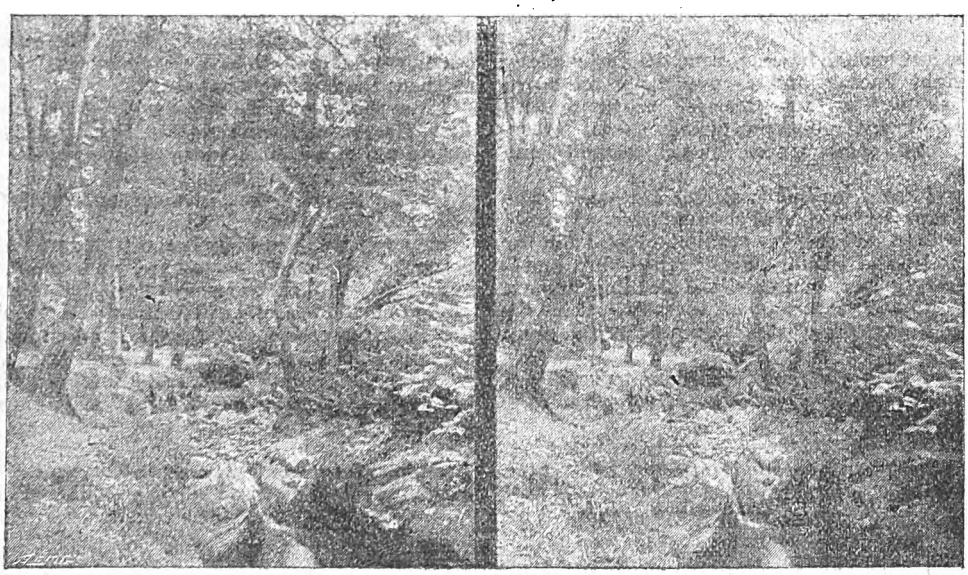
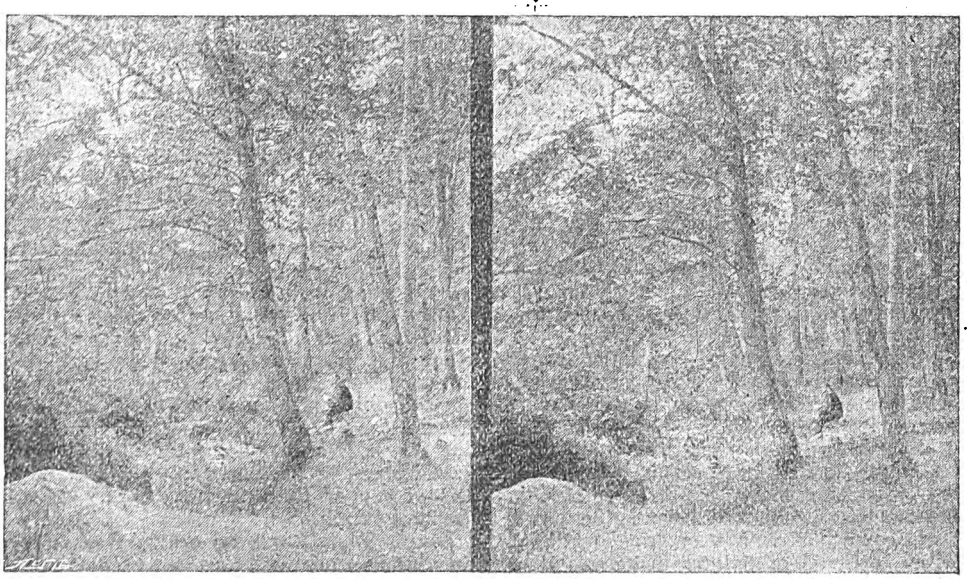


An English Woodland Scene.



"Resting."

Readers will be pleased to hear that we are now giving away Stereoscopes in connection with our WEEKLY POSTCARD COMPETITION.—See page 588.

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ROY McKINNON'S FRIEND.

JAVA astern; the Indian Ocean ahead, and perfect weather.

There was just enough breeze to send the *Kestrel* along seven or eight knots; and as everybody on board her, from skipper to boy, seemed possessed with the happy-go-lucky, go-as-you-please spirit, everybody was, by consequence, quite content and comfortable.

The *Kestrel* was a teak-built sailing barque of some six-hundred tons burden; and of the old-fashioned "tub" order. That is to say; she was "full-and-round" in her lines just where she should have "raked—in" and—"home." She, in fact, developed the plodding "pound ahead" qualities of the bull-dog, rather than the more-to-be-desired "beam" and "counter" of the greyhound.

When I say that everybody on board was afflicted with this *dolce far niente* disease, I am, perhaps, a trifle over-pessimistic.

Roy McKinnon, the mate, was certainly an exception. This was his first voyage in the ship, and it must be confessed that at a very early period of the trip he had contracted a feeling of deep disgust with regard both to the vessel and her commander.

Roy was a smart seaman, an A.1 navigator, and a fine specimen of British manhood.

He had served his apprenticeship in a certain famous Mediterranean steam line. In this employ he had remained for nearly eleven years, until, in fact, he had passed for "chief."

Then, having no outlet for his superfluous energy (the Service being, in many respects, limited), he decided to seek a wider experience, and as the position of first officer of the *Kestrel* offered the desired opportunity, he applied for, and obtained it.

From the day he went aboard, he saw that there would be a clashing of interests, but as articles had been signed, there was no loophole of escape, nothing to do but to make the best of it.

It was not until their fourth day at sea, that Roy made a discovery, which, he then little imagined, was destined to have a marked influence upon his share of the events of the next six months.

This discovery was nothing less than the presence aboard of the Captain's daughter.

It seems that she had been keeping her cabin through indisposition; not a soul, forward or aft, except the steward, having the slightest suspicion that the port state-room was occupied by a lady.

Secrecy in the matter was accounted for by the existence of a regulation of the owners', which ran, "that in no case are ships' masters in this employ to carry with them, as passengers, or otherwise, on board their vessels, wife, or other relative or friend, without permission given, on pain of prompt dismissal upon first possible opportunity."

As said permission was never, under any circumstances, accorded, it naturally followed that to deliberately break the rule, was to risk loss of ship, and, that which was far more serious, loss of professional reputation.

Roy McKinnon, of course, was aware of all this, but, like a wise man, elected to mind his own business; leaving the skipper to look after his own.

Then, the inevitable happened.

From the date of the discovery, right up to the day first referred to, a process was silently going on in the hearts and minds of these two young people that could have but one conclusion.

Captain Seymour was, by reason of his habitual self-concentration, blind to it all.

He never troubled himself about things, which had no concern for himself personally. He would not have suggested, on his own initiative, that his daughter Madge should accompany him on this particular trip.

The girl pressed to be allowed to go, promising to be very discreet, and to save himself the worry and nuisance of arguing the matter, he gave his consent (reluctantly, it must be admitted), well knowing that the chances of ultimate unpleasantness were as ten-to one.

Madge never showed herself on deck in the day time, but in the first night watch she would, on fine evenings steal up to the weather side of the poop, intent upon getting a little fresh air.

At these times, whether by luck or design, watch time or below, Roy would turn up without fail, in the light of her eyes, and in the tones of her voice finding the keenest delight and satisfaction.

She was the sort of girl most men of his stamp would worship.

Not so particularly tall, her somewhat slight figure and well-poised little head gave her a winsome attractiveness Roy, at any rate, could not resist.

When the captain found that it was no use attempting to shut the eyes of his ship's company, he just let things slide, trusting to the chapter of accidents to get him out of the impending mess.

Still, he was far from being pleased with the existing state of things, as between Madge and Roy McKinnon.

Unenergetic himself, he could not but admire the young fellow's personality, his pluck, fine principles, and general devotion to duty. Yet, in spite of all this, or (he being who and what he was) because of it, he disliked his chief-officer, unreasoningly, but decidedly.

Roy had seen this from the beginning, and so left no loophole for animadversion or complaint.

The destination of the *Kestrel* was Batavia, with an open commission to touch at Pontiana, Western Borneo. At Pontiana was to be found an agent of the owners, one Sweyn Everett, who combined with his commercial duties those of British Consul, and, in a semi-official sort of way, of Political Resident at the tiny court of the local Rajah.

Sweyn Everett was no ordinary man, being strong (in a moral sense) and capable to a degree.

One of two brothers, he, the elder, had chosen this out-of-the-way corner of the earth as the field for his life-work; while the younger, Roger, entering the employ of Axtell and Bruce as gentleman apprentice as a lad of thirteen, had now become second mate of the *Kestrel*.

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Roger Everett and Roy McKinnon were as unlike each other in every respect as it is possible for the men to be. But, strangely, this did not prevent their becoming friends.

Love we know is blind, but so sometimes is friendship. It was the case in this particular instance.

Intellectual, a master of keen trenchant criticism of men and things, Roger Everett irresistibly attracted the good-natured, unsuspicious, simple-minded Roy.

He seemed to lay himself out to please his senior officer, altering his manner not a jot when Roy's more than passing interest in Madge Seymour developed and increased.

For aught Roy knew, his friend rejoiced at his good fortune, and apparently played Roy's game with the skipper.

Now it is doubtful, in the light of after events, whether Captain Seymour would, of his own accord, have availed himself of the clause in his instructions giving him discretionary power with regard to visiting Pontiana. That which influenced him to do so was a conversation with his second officer a few hours after leaving Batavia.

"Yes, I know," he said in reply to a remark of Everett's. "But it'll be all right. They won't sack me just for giving my girl a little sea air! I've been too long with 'em."

"Don't be too sure of that," rejoined the other. "Now, you are aware that I am not quite without good standing at Fenchurch Street, and also, that a word from me to my brother at Pontiana will be all sufficient to make things smooth at head-quarters, with regard to this little 'breaking-the-rule' episode.

"If you continue the straight road home from here, then there's only one possible ending to it all; and that one, rather undesirable and unpleasant than otherwise."

"Yes, I know!—but—"

"A moment, please. On the other hand, put in at Pontiana, and comply with my condition—or request, rather—and your position as master of the barque *Kestrel* is in no way jeopardized, but, contrariwise, is more assured than ever."

"Well, but, look here, man! I've no authority over Madge. She's just too much for me. I can't compel her to marry you. Besides, she's over head and ears infatuated with McKinnon, and——"

"Hang McKinnon! That's nothing. Put in at Pontiana, as I say; give me your consent to my marriage with your daughter, and—leave the rest to me."

"Great Neptune! Have your own way!" snapped the skipper, the while pulling furiously at his pipe. "Only—no nonsense, you know, Everett! She's my child, and she's no one to look after her but me. I'm not so sure that if I didn't detest that chief McKinnon so, I'd as soon see her spliced to him as to anybody."

"Well! I wouldn't;" retorted Everett, a nasty look in his eyes, "and I don't mean to. Anyway, I've got your consent; and I'll take the risk—if there is any."

In the captain's cabin, during the second dog-watch, and with the door shut, it was that this precious bargain was made.

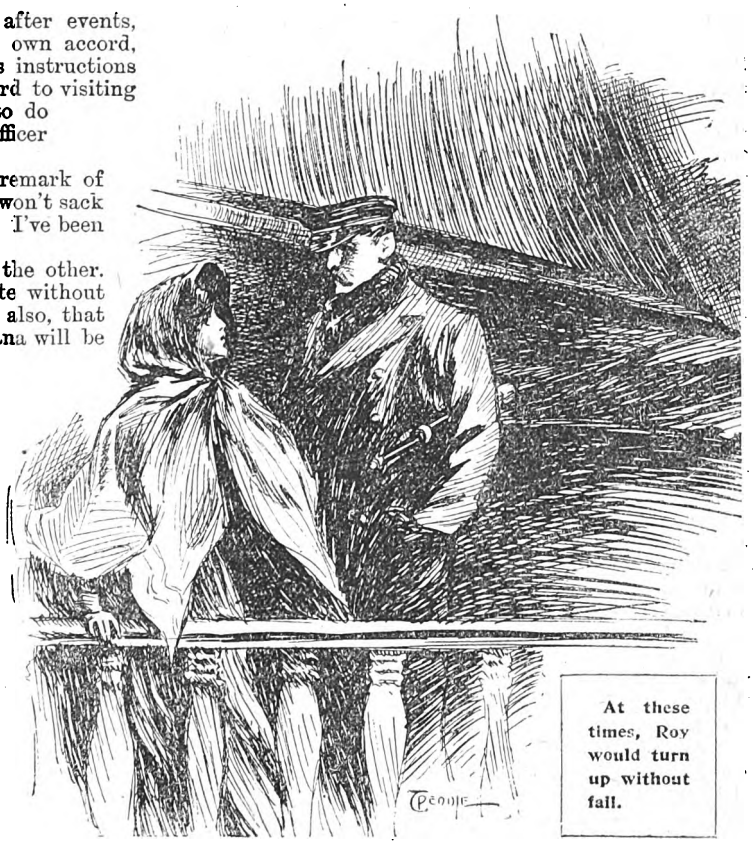
The *Kestrel* was heading for the Indian Ocean through the Straits of Suida, everyone on board imagining—none more surely than Roy McKinnon—that a straight course for home was the order of the day.

It was the chief's watch below; from eight-bells to midnight; and when, about three-bells, he was awakened by the noisy hauling on the braces, he jumped into his clothes, and ran up on deck to see the cause.

He soon found that the course had been altered and that they were running before a fair wind, for Western Borneo.

Having had no intimation of this from the skipper, Roy was not alone surprised, but also a little angered.

Everett, whose watch, of course, it was, busy with



At these times, Roy would turn up without fail.

trimming sail, kept out of Roy's way, and it was only when everything was taut and ship-shape, that the mate could get a word with him.

"Hullo!" he said, "when did you get the order for going about?"

"In the second-dog—the old man has decided after all, to put in at Pontiana."

"Rather sudden, isn't it?" said Roy; "he never whispered a word of it to me when I saw him at muster."

"My dear fellow! You know the skipper, and so do I. He never does anything like anybody else. In this instance he's changed his mind, I suppose, and—well, that's all that can be said about it."

"Well, I still think that he ought to have let me

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know what he was going to do," insisted Roy, rather hotly; "and I'll tell him so before I'm much older."

"I wouldn't, if I were you; he's always at his worst when he's been smoking hard all day, and he's been at it like a chimney ever since eight-bells this morning."

"Ah, well! I'll turn in again now. So long Everett!"

"So long, old chap!"

Roy had descended the companion, and was about to enter his cabin, when, out of the darkness, came a hand that laid itself lightly upon his arm, while a voice he knew only too well whispered in his ear:

"Roy! Take this—quick!"

A folded paper was then thrust into his hand.

"I'll be up on deck half-an-hour after you go on watch at midnight. Meanwhile, read this before you sleep."

Roy tried to detain her, but Madge was gone, and there was nothing left for him but to shut himself in and read the letter.

"Roy," it ran, "there is something going on that threatens to separate you and me. Roger Everett is at the bottom of it, and my father—my father, I say, Roy, is doing the other's bidding. I overheard them just before eight bells. My state-room, as you know, is next my father's cabin. Everett has some deep design, I am sure, to do you an injury, on our arrival at Pontiana. It is he who has persuaded my father to put in there. Be on your guard. I will be true! as I know you will be, dear; but don't trust your friend.

M."

Roy's first impulse was to rush out on to the "poop," and to shake the life out of Roger Everett.

Then second thoughts prevailed, suggesting caution and wariness.

Perhaps Madge, who evidently had probed the secret, would have something more to tell him later on, when he saw her.

"The miserable swab! Well, I am an innocent to allow myself to be 'hulled' by a skunk like that! But I'll be even with him, and if he thinks to get my Madge from me (for that's what he's aiming at, I verily believe) he'll have to get her through me, and I'm not quite a shadow."

There is only a matter of 250 miles between Batavia and Pontiana, and so there was every likelihood, all things being favourable, of their making the latter port about the evening of the second day.

Clearly then, if Everett was to be checkmated, there was not much time to lose.

As one bell in the middle watch sounded from the break of the poop, to be answered by the look-out on the fo'castle head, Madge stood at Roy's side by the weather taffrail.

Though the breeze was strong, the ship was steady, the yards and sails demanding no attention from the watch on deck.

Madge then communicated to Roy the fact of Everett's brother being the British Consul at Pontiana, and that it was through the influence of his relative with the native authorities that the younger brother no doubt hoped to be able to effect something that should at once make for the undoing of the chief mate, and bring about the realization of his scheme with regard to herself.

They talked long and earnestly, the stolid, silent figure at the wheel being the only other present, and making no sign.

At last, about four bells Madge suddenly interrupted Roy as he was about to speak

"I have it!" she said in a suppressed excited whisper, and, glancing round apprehensively at old Jan Olsen on the wheel-grating, whose eye never roved from an alternate conning of binnacle and canvas, "I have it! Roy! When do you expect that we shall be in?"

"At Pontiana?"

"Yes."

"Well, this is strange water to me, but I should say that, if this wind holds, we ought to make port somewhere about noon the day after to-morrow."

"Thirty hours!—or nearly, from now," she murmured to herself. "Roy!" she then said, "will you be content to remain in ignorance of that which I am going to do?"

"I don't quite know what you mean," he answered her; "only that, maybe, you will be in danger and I am powerless to help you."

"I don't think so," she said. "No I don't think so; either the one or the other. It is like this, Roy, I alone, as a woman, can carry out the plan I have conceived. With all the good-will in the world, you, dear, as a man, would assuredly risk failure, because, forgive me, Roy—you would not be able to control yourself."

"Very well, then, Madge, you shall have your way, and I—will just wait and watch."

"That's it, dear—wait you and watch, while I—work!"

At this moment Madge drew Roy's attention to the sudden appearing of a light in the second-mate's berth on the starboard side the "cuddy."

By leaning over the break-rail they could clearly see Roger Everett seat himself at his flap table, and commence writing.

Evidently that upon which he was engaged was of absorbing interest; for, as he proceeded, his pen flew faster and faster; while his compressed lips and knitted brows denoted that the subject matter of the document was, from his point of view at least, of supreme importance.

Madge was a girl of whom it might be said, that she was modesty incarnate, but when an idea, or rather a modification of her original scheme, now flashed across her mind, in connection with that which she now beheld. She herself even hesitated before the thought.

It is only with some, although perhaps with the great majority of women, that hesitation is fatal, it was certainly not so with Madge.

Hurriedly bidding her lover a temporary farewell, she left his side, and, rapidly descending the port companion, was soon in her own room.

She could see, as she passed by the "cuddy," that the second-mate was still busy writing; and the sight only strengthened her resolution.

She sat, it might have been for a little over half-an-hour, with her door ajar, and listening intently.

There was not a sound from her father's cabin, while, as for the watch on deck they were, it being fine and "steady" weather, as quiet as mice.

At half-past three she rose and, first putting on a pair of soft slippers, crept warily through the empty saloon towards the starboard door that led out on to the main deck.

Close by and outside this door, and under the starboard companion, was the second mate's berth. The light was now out, and Madge, her face white and set with stern consternation of purpose, noiselessly turned the door-handle, stepped lightly over the sill, and, without further entering the little place, stretched forth her right hand towards the flap-table, and snatched from off

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it the paper that lay there, gleaming white in the semi-darkness.

A quick straining of her ears in the direction of the sleeping Everett, and then, reassured, she gently closed the door; sped back through the silent saloon, and, gaining her own room, sank down, trembling, upon a locker-seat, the paper crushed in her clenched right hand.

* * * * *

The next day, an hour after noon, when the *Kestrel* dropped anchor in Pontiana Roads, Captain Seymour stood by the port taffrail, watching a small boat, containing three persons, pulling towards the ship.

"Captain Seymour, I believe?" said a tall, spare, soldierly-looking man, clad in white linen, approaching the skipper.

Madge drew Roy's attention to the sudden appearance of a light.

"The same; and you, sir?"

"Her Britannic Majesty's Consul, and agent for Messrs Axtell and Bruce, Sweyn Everett, at your service."

"Pleased to meet you, sir," replied Seymour, just a little constrainedly, as not being quite sure of what might be coming.

"May I see your papers, captain, if you please?"

"Oh, yes! of course! if you'll come below, I'll show them to you."

The second-mate, as is usual on arrival or departure, had charge of the ship's aft, and though at the moment of the Consul's arrival, too much occupied to greet his brother, he now entered the saloon immediately after the two other men.

Madge was not visible, she having shut herself in her room.

"Ah, Roger!" said the Consul, catching sight of his brother, "how are you, lad?"

"All right, thanks, Sweyn. But I've something to say before you tackle the ship's papers."

"Eh!" said the other, looking up sharply; "something to say? What is it?"

"This. You have power, Sweyn, haven't you, to deal with naval deserters?"

"Yes; why?"

"Well, there's one here aboard the *Kestrel*, and I accordingly make oath that Roy McKinnon, otherwise Archibald Roy, late of H.M.S. *Defiance*, deserted from that vessel some time during the month of December last, subsequently shipping as chief mate of this ship by means of forged certificates and discharges, manipulated by himself. In confirmation of this I have here"—handing a paper to his brother—"a communication from a friend of mine, an officer on board the *Defiance*, now stationed at Gibraltar."

"Roger Everett! you lie!"

Each man's eyes were fixed upon Madge, who stood in the doorway of the starboard state-room, holding an open paper in her hand.

"Hullo!" said the consul, "A lady! Didn't know, captain, you had any passengers aboard!"

"Mr. Everett," said Madge, approaching the table at which sat her father and the Consul, "I believe that man," pointing to the second mate, who stood, white-faced and gnawing his moustache, with his back to the "cuddy" partition, "is your brother. I cannot say, sir, that I congratulate you on the relationship. I wish, first of all, to say that the statement just made by Mr. Roger Everett is false in every particular. That this is so, you will see if you read this."

Madge gave him the paper she held, and waited.

Swiftly moving towards his brother, Roger Everett made to snatch the paper from him, but the Consul's grip of it was too sure, only a small corner being torn away in the attempt.

"She stole it from my cabin!" cried the baffled traitor.

"Did she?" calmly responded Consul Sweyn. "Then all I can say is that she was right plucky, while it seems to me, Roger, that for once you have stepped across the line."

"Will you give me that paper?" roared his brother.

"Certainly not, until I have read it, and not then if its contents, as Miss——" turning towards Madge and inclining his head courteously.

"Seymour—I am Captain Seymour's daughter."

"Oh, indeed! charmed to make your acquaintance, Miss Seymour. But let us see what this terrible paper contains."

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"Roger Everett, you lie!"

As he read on, his features changed in expression from light good-humour to grave surprise.

"Roger," at last he said, looking his brother steadily and sternly in the face, "this is a serious matter—for you. The paper I hold in my hand, and given me by this young lady, warrants me in placing you under arrest for conspiracy and forgery; inasmuch as I am persuaded, the two copies," touching the duplicate on the table, "being identical, that the supposed Lieutenant Shannon of H. M. S. *Defiance*, has no existence, except in your own imagination. This being so, I can hardly place such faith in your statement with regard to Chief-officer Roy McKinnon, as to act upon it, or even take serious notice of it. Your motive," he here looked across at Madge, "is self-apparent, although, if you thought to gain your end by this fraudulent edging of your rival out of your way, I must write you down as being lacking to a greater extent in commonsense than I gave you credit for. Kindly send for your chief officer, Captain Seymour."

When Roy heard all, he was, though not, as we know, unprepared, righteously and naturally indignant that one, who had been professedly his friend, should have struck him so dastardly a blow.

Sent ignominiously to his cabin, Roger Everett saw plainly that he had lost not only his professional prestige, but also the esteem and affection of the only relative he had in the world.

Both Madge and Roy pleaded hard for mercy for the man, who had sought so mercilessly to injure them.

To a certain extent they prevailed, the Consul, however, insisting, as he had both, the right and power to do, that his recreant brother should at once leave the ship (his name to be taken off the vessel's books), and that he should remain on shore at Pontiana, until such time as he, the elder, should be able to arrange some sort of a future for him.

It may be said that the second and self-produced copy of the letter from the mythical Lieutenant Shannon, had been "manufactured" upon the removal by Madge of the first forgery.

With the exception of the detected schemer, the only uneasy mind aboard the *Kestrel* now was that of her commander, who, apart from the narrowly escaped consequences of his weak littleness, and almost criminal carelessness, had still the fear of reprimand, and perhaps worse, before his eyes.

But he was, after all, to be let down lightly, and considering his offence (the mere giving his daughter a free trip to the tropics) it cannot be said that he deserved aught else.

"Captain Seymour," said the Consul with a smile, a few days later, as he stood at the gangway, the *Kestrel*, her anchor hove short, shaking out her canvas for her home flight, "the little matter of the lady passenger will, I give you my word, be no more heard of, only, as the schoolmaster said to the schoolboy, 'Don't do it again.' As for Miss Madge, take my advice, captain, give her away as soon as you reach home. Mr. McKinnon won't say no, I'll swear. Ah! here she is—good-bye, my dear young lady! and take a lonely man's heart-felt wishes for your life-long happiness. McKinnon is a fortunate man to have so true and faithful a little friend—Good-bye!" Ralph Enderby.

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New Serial.—Start To-day.

By HEADON HILL.

Author of "The Peril of the Prince," "Seaward for the Foe," "Guilty Gold," etc.

SUMMARY.

THE steamship *Trojan* is homeward bound from the Cape. On board is Michael Standridge, who is returning to England from the Kimberley diamond fields, in possession of the "Kimberley Elephant," the largest diamond found in the colony. On the ship is his half-brother, Simon Hoathley. On the way up the English Channel the latter steals into the miner's cabin with the intention of murdering him and obtaining possession of the diamond. The miner, however, is on the alert, and presents a pistol at the intruder's head.

Michael sells his diamond for £20,000 to Messrs. Strauss and Lightfoot, whose clerk, Swinley Tasker, he discovers in an attempt to rob him of £35. Michael reads Tasker a lecture, kicks him, and departs—having made an enemy of this rascal. Reading is where Michael expects to find news of his daughter, and he purchases Kennett's Cross, a dilapidated farmhouse in the neighbourhood, this house meeting his requirements by being very secluded, and on a clay soil suitable for brickmaking.

He spends his time in making bricks, and as each batch is made he draws out from the bank a thousand pounds in gold, until at length his balance is quite low. One day Michael is thrown out of his pony-trap, and enters a house for assistance. Here he finds Cuthbert Blakesley, the cashier at the bank, and two ladies, and recognises in the younger one, to whom Cuthbert is engaged to be married, a strong resemblance to his wife.

Mrs. Bonfield is able to prove that Marion is Michael's daughter, and he promises to acquaint her shortly with the secret of Kennett's Cross. A few weeks later Marion and Cuthbert are sitting in the garden, waiting for her father, when a constable enters and arrests Cuthbert on the charge of murdering Michael.

At the inquest which follows strong evidence against Cuthbert is given. The latter also makes a statement.

CHAPTER VI. (*continued*).

"IT was perfectly true, as Inspector Dimmock has said, that I threw these articles amongst the rest of my soiled linen—I do not know whether he wishes to infer that it would have been a sign of innocence if I had worn them next day—and it is also quite true that some of the blood had found its way from my hands to the handle of the bicycle. I noticed the condition of the handle on Saturday afternoon when I was about to use the machine, and left it at home for that reason, and walked instead.

"That, gentlemen, is the whole history of my visit to Kennett's Cross, of what I did there, and of the blood stains on my linen. I have also told you why I kept silence about having seen Mr. Standridge. It is true that he did not repeat his request during the evening, but I considered myself bound by the injunction in the letter. Would to Heaven that I had disobeyed him, and kept that letter, for it would have substantiated at least a portion of my statement, but I destroyed it. By some malignity of fate I have even lost the envelope, which I did preserve—at least, I cannot recollect tearing it up. That might have helped you to believe me. As it is, I can only tell you my story, and trust to some—at present unforseen—circumstance to substantiate it before it is too late. I know no more of the fate of Michael Standridge—a man whom I liked and respected, and with whom I looked to have still closer ties—than you know yourselves."

When the prisoner stood back at the close of his narrative, there ran round the room a hum of whispered comment, in which sympathetic approval was nicely balanced with incredulity. Even some of the jury seemed to be won over by the young man's straightforward manner, till they were reminded by sterner colleagues that they had to go by evidence alone, and that what they had just listened to was unsupported by independent testimony.

The coroner was beginning to turn over his notes with a view to commencing his summing up, when Detective-Inspector Dimmock stepped forward. He had been conversing with a late arrival—a black-coated gentleman with an air of professional importance, who had entered during Blakesly's statement

"I should like to add, sir," said the Inspector, "that the premises and the road outside have been thoroughly searched, and that we have been unable to find either the body of the cat, or the trap which Mr. Blakesly says the deceased carried to the house. And I have another witness, sir," the detective added significantly. "Dr. Chain, of the Home Office, is here."

The Coroner made a motion of assent, and the celebrated analyst, whose crucibles and test-tubes have played an important part in so many great trials during the last quarter of a century, was duly sworn. He said:

"I yesterday received from Inspector Dimmock a nickel-plated cycle bell, a pair of shirt cuffs, and a cambric pocket-handkerchief. On the bell there was a congealed drop of blood, and there were smeary stains on the handkerchief and cuffs which I have no hesitation in saying were caused by blood also. At present I have only had time to subject the drop on the bell to examination. I selected this for treatment first, because the metal being non absorbent, it offered greater facilities for analysis. I have applied the usual tests, both chemical and microscopic, to the drop, and the results were very clear and well-defined."

"The drop was undoubtedly blood?" asked the coroner.

"Yes," replied Dr. Chain, "that much was settled from a very early stage in the analysis. My examination was principally directed at diagnosing the character of the

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blood. The non-absorbent metal was the greatest use at helping me to arrive at a definite conclusion, for I had a comparatively large bulk of the substance to work upon. In all my forensic experience I have seldom if ever had more favourable conditions for tracing a blood sample to its prime source."

"And your final conclusion, Dr. Chain?"

"I confidently pronounce the blood to have been shed by a human being."

The majority of the audience had failed to see the drift of the analyst's learned remarks, but the veriest rustic there comprehended the meaning of his last sentence. It meant with startling swiftness, the whole fabric of Cuthbert Blakesly's defence had crumbled into ruins—into hopeless ruins, which the cold light of science had left void and without form—unless it was the form of the gigantic lie which the prisoner stood revealed of having shaped to his own ends. And the young man's gestures and attitude were as good as a confession, the people thought. Pressing his hands to his eyes he shrank back between his two guardians, as though instinctively surrendering himself to the inevitable. As the Home Office official bowed to the coroner and retired there was not a man in the room who did not think he could truly forecast the verdict which would follow the coroner's address.

CHAPTER VII.

Theory Yields to Conclusion.

It was a verdict of "Wilful Murder against Cuthbert Blakesly." And as the crowd filed out into the lengthening shadows of the lane, Mr. Superintendent Gunning and his trusty aide congratulated each other on the neatness of their case.

"It is no use looking further on the principal charge," said the superintendent. "We have got the right party safe enough, and sorry I am for it on some accounts. What can have possessed the fellow, I wonder?"

"The fourteen thousand golden sovereigns was what possessed him, I reckon," replied the sympathetic Dimmock, "and I mean to prove that he now possesses the sovereigns. They must be hidden about here somewhere ready for subsequent removal. The money weighs over two hundredweight, and he could never have got away with that on a bicycle."

"Had he a confederate, think you?" said the superintendent.

"I see what you mean," said Dimmock, "that he may have had help in removing the money. I don't think it for a moment. It is clearly a single-handed affair. The evidence all points to that; he was seen returning alone."

"True," assented the superintendent. "Well, it is too dark to commence to-night. We will come out to-morrow and go over the ground systematically. There are plenty of hiding-places in those burrowing brick works behind the house."

"That is where we shall find the stuff," said Dimmock confidently.

At ten o'clock on the following morning, Superintendent Gunning and Inspector Dimmock drove up to Kennett's Cross in their trap, and were received by the two constables who had been detailed to sleep on the premises till the question of the missing money should have been solved or given up.

"Anything fresh, Haynes?" asked Dimmock, as he jumped to the ground, to be followed more leisurely by his superior.

"No, sir," replied the senior constable addressed; "leastways, nothing of importance. Burton thought he heard a footstep in the lane during the evening."

"You didn't hear it? No one came to the door?"

"No, sir; I didn't hear nothing, and nobody came to the house," was the reply. "I went out into the lane with my bull's-eye, but couldn't see anyone. If there was any person there it must have been a chance passer-by; but Burton is a trifle nervous—don't like being in the house with a corpse—and I think there was just nothing."

The Inspector looked contemptuously after the younger constable who was leading away the horse and trap. Having got his man safely landed in Reading jail, and being of opinion that it was a single-handed job, he at once attributed the footstep to "moonshine," and said so. Dimmock was a detective of the dogged and persevering school, who, having once formed his theory had no room for fresh ones, but pursued the original idea to the bitter end—more often than not, it is but fair to say, with success. But then mysterious crimes were not plentiful in the quiet Berkshire country, and this was a new experience. It was his practice, when he had satisfied himself that a pet theory was incapable of proof, to pooh-pooh the whole affair, and maintain that there was nothing to be discovered at all.

The inside of the house having been already overhauled, it was to the ground in the rear that the Inspector meant to devote his talents on this occasion. But first, accompanied by the Superintendent and one of the constables, he went to the only detached outbuilding that had survived the general decay—the stable at the side in which Michael had kept his pony—and here almost at the outset he made a discovery.

The place was little better than a shed, one end having been used for housing the cart, and the other, fitted with a home-made manger, for stabling the pony. The animal had been removed on the previous day, as there was no one to look after it; but a heap of fodder remained in a corner, and the soft hay bore the distinct impress of a man's form.

"We are getting warm, I believe," said Dimmock, as he called the attention of the Superintendent to the indented shape. "This is where he must have laid up before going to the house to do the trick—left his bicycle here, no doubt, for, of course, that yarn about his having been invited to call is all my eye. He never left his machine at the front gate to give himself away."

"Looks as if you were right, surely," said the Superintendent, who had great faith in his assistant's capacity.

"And that being so," proceeded Dimmock, "the chances are that the stuff is hidden somewhere about the stable. The argument runs this way; he would have to come back here for the bicycle, anyhow—with the coin on him, mind you. Well, in the first place, it must have been precious heavy, and, in the second, he would have been in an uncommon hurry to clear out and begone after a butcher's job like that. To streak it is always the murderer's first move. He would have poked his plunder out of sight in the first handy place he came to."

While speaking he had already begun to toss the hay aside in the momentary expectation of coming upon a sack of gold, but the "discovery" went no further. Then they took spades and dug up the earthen floor; they ripped off the thatch and demolished the manger; they split up the planking of the walls till the shed was a ruin, but no gold or sign of a concealed hiding-place did they find.

The Inspector began to get angry and the others despondent, but after having enunciated his reasons why the stable was likely to have been chosen, Dimmock would not give in before the building was practically razed to the ground. Then he remembered he had previously stated his conviction that the brick-kilns in the paddocks would repay a search, and fell back on that as a saving clause.

"Come along, boys," he cried, "I was a fool to be led away from my own programme. I ought to have stuck to the original idea. Let's get on and try the open; there's nothing here."

The constables were used to Mr. Dimmock's ways, and the Superintendent tolerated them in view of his utility, so that the calm repudiation of the authorship of the "stable theory" excited no rejoinder. They trooped after him docilely, and even watched with admiration, as he searched

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the garden, the hedges, and the deserted brickfield from end to end, turning over the heaps of clay and peering into trench and kiln in his confidence that the prisoner had hidden Standridge's stolen hoard somewhere, whence he could subsequently remove it in safety when the hue and cry had ceased.

But the search revealed absolutely nothing. In the trenches were no marks of disturbance of the soil; the blackened kilns were ransacked in vain, and the desolate garden yielded nothing but overgrown vegetation.

The stage had arrived when, in an ordinary case, Dimmock would have begun to express disbelief in a crime having been committed at all; but with a prisoner in custody and a verdict of wilful murder presented by the coroner's jury, that was clearly impossible.

Tired and cross the three men sat down to rest at last on the brick wall which Michael had built between the paddock and the kitchen garden. Their operations had been watched from afar by a score or so of idle spectators whom curiosity had brought out from the town, and who were obliged to content themselves with a distant view of the search from the bank of the high road that, beyond an intervening field, skirted the property.

On seeing the policemen desist from their labours most of them set off to trudge homewards, but one had apparently remained, for just as the Superintendent and Inspector had produced some light refreshment from their coat-tails they were astonished to receive a hail from an individual seen through the hedge at the top of the bank.

"Good-day to you, gentlemen! May I be allowed to intrude?" was the only audible part of the request that reached them.

"Bit of cool cheek—that," commented the Inspector, taking no notice of the call. He was in just the humour to fall foul of anyone who gave him a chance.

"It must be a newspaper reporter," said the Superintendent, "no one else would have the impudence. Better go and see what the fellow wants, Haynes," he added to the constable. "We don't want it to get into the papers that the search has been a dead failure. If he is a reporter you can bring him back with you."

"And if he's anything else take him into custody for loitering on the public highway," ejaculated the angry Dimmock after the retreating constable.

But presently Haynes was seen returning from his errand alone, while the invisible one still waited at the hedge.

"He isn't a reporter," said the constable when he reached them. "He's an American detective over here on business, and, being in the neighbourhood, took an interest in the case. Says he thought, being in the same line, you would allow him to introduce himself. Sends his compliments on the masterly way the prisoner was copped."

Dimmock smirked at the flattering message, and recovered his temper.

"These Yankees are uncommon farseeing chaps," he said. "Their detectives could show some of us a thing or two. Shall we have him in, Mr. Gunning—not officially, or to interfere of course—but just to do the civil?"

"International courtesy is never wasted," said the Superintendent pompously.

"Yes, Haynes, tell the gentleman that if he will step this way we shall be pleased to make his acquaintance."

The constable again departed to fetch the stranger, who quickly found a convenient gap, and came across the field to the garden wall. He was a man of spare frame, and by no means young; but his features were so covered by huge Dundreary whiskers and an enormous moustache, that it was difficult to guess his exact age, or to gather much from his face, except that he had a peculiar twist or trick of the eye. He was dressed in a tweed suit of very loud check pattern, and on politely removing a brand-new silk hat, disclosed a luxuriant head of coal-black hair.

"That's a wig," whispered Dimmock to Gunning. "I suppose his job requires disguise."

"This is indeed a pleasure," the stranger began, with an eye for each, and in a very pronounced American accent. "I shall be able to tell my colleagues across the water that I have seen the flower of the British police on the warpath. My name, gentlemen, is Cyrus B. Keeling, of the New York Central Office; and as I was in Reading—tiresome commercial case in hand—I thought it would be wrong of me—real wrong—to miss a chance of learning something of your methods in a big thing like this. Thank you for the permit."

The implied deference was soothing after the morning's failure, and the two officials jumped down from the wall to fraternize.

When the introduction had been reciprocated, Mr. Cyrus B. Keeling put the question, which, under the circumstances, was only natural—had they unearthed the old man's dollars?

"Not yet," said Dimmock. "I've formed a strong opinion, though," and he looked knowingly at Mr. Keeling as though to invite an exchange of views. The Inspector, when in a tight place, was not above sucking another man's brains—provided he could do so with a certainty of gaining the credit of results—and he thought he might extract some happy hit from the American.

But that astute personage merely remarked, "Ah!" pronounced in a tone pregnant with suggestion. As Mr. Keeling spoke the exclamation it seemed to mean: "Of course if such a brilliant officer has formed an opinion, it is pretty sure to be the right one. I wonder if it is the same as mine, but I have no business to ask what it is. There is no presumption about me."

Dimmock was forced to be more direct.

"And what do you think of the case from the outside view, as read in the papers?" he persisted, admiring the stranger's respectful reserve, but keener than ever not to miss the chance of a cheap hint from an expert. A man who was selected for a mission across the Atlantic must be at the top of the tree, he argued to himself.

"Well, naturally that is the only point of view I could adopt," said Mr. Keeling, smiling at Dimmock, and keeping a deferential eye on the Superintendent at the same time "I shouldn't have ventured to mention it if you hadn't asked, but one thing gripped me from the start—that the cash would never be found in the house. The prisoner would have stowed it somewhere where he'd have had access—if you hadn't arrested him so smartly—and I opine he would not have access to the house."

"Not much," returned the Inspector. "There are a couple of our fellows sleeping there till we've satisfied ourselves, and he'd have foreseen that. I agree with you the coin wouldn't be inside the house. I knew that from the first, though, of course, we've looked."

The stranger's smiling eye smiled more appreciatively than ever.

"Then if I was working the case," he proceeded, "I should arrive at the conclusion—I always go plumb-centre for conclusions. There's three here, one on top of the other, till you get to the final."

"Quite so, of course, having the case in hand officially, I mustn't say much, but you may," said Dimmock, with a wink, as though there couldn't be the least doubt of what the conclusions were.

"Conclusion first—the money's not in the house for reasons stated," began Mr. Keeling, counting on his skinny yellow fingers. "Conclusion second—it's not hidden outdoors, and intelligent experts have searched for it for a whole morning without success. Conclusion third and final"—he paused a little to give effect to this point—"the money being neither hidden inside nor outside the house, it isn't hidden anywhere at all. The prisoner did the murder right enough, but he drew a blank when it came to lifting the cash—'cos why, there was none to lift. Old man Standridge had spent it all himself—blown it on the Stock Exchange, or lost it betting. You know what these gold-

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miners are when they have landed a pile—real mean and miserable till they're stony broke again."

Dimmock had hard work to preserve his air of confidential mystery on hearing the final conclusion. He was delighted with it; so neatly did it fit with his exigencies, but not for the world would he have it known that he had not evolved it himself. He winked again and said:

"We're kindred spirits, Mr. Keeling—kindred spirits, I can see. What a gift it is to be able to read these little problems that are so puzzling to the ordinary mind. I am glad to have met you, sir, and hope we shall meet in the town. Are you making any stay in Reading?"

But, unfortunately for the budding friendship, Mr. Cyrus B. Keeling was leaving the town that day, and the country on the morrow, for his native "N. York," and had to decline the pressing invitations which both Gunning and Dimmock extended to him to look them up in their homes. In fact, even now he ought to be "making tracks for the depôt," and, after renewed compliments and many hopes for future meetings, he parted from the two officers and made his way across the field to the high road.

"By Jingo! it's a treat to rub against a chap with brains like that," said Dimmock as they watched the stranger's sinuous form disappear through the gap.

"Of course, I wasn't going to let on, but do you know he's just hit the idea I was about to moot to you when he cropped up? It is a clear case there has been no robbery. Standridge had made away with his money himself by spending it, and young Blakesly has shoved his head into the noose for nothing."

"If you think that, there's an end of the matter, I suppose," said the Superintendent, who was a cautious man, and would not commit himself. "We can quietly adopt that view ourselves, but I think it is a little early to make it public. Best let on for the present that we hope to trace the cash, and then we're right either way if anything turns up."

And that was the end of the police search for Michael Standridge's missing money.

In the meanwhile the recipient of "International courtesy" was bending his steps, not towards the town, but to a little wayside station four miles off on a branch line.

"The coast will be clear in a day or two," he said to himself musingly, as he plunged into a network of country lanes. "Friend Dimmock was as grateful as a monkey for an unexpected nut over the non-robbery conclusion, and the withdrawal of the garrison is bound to follow. A 'kindred spirit' he called me. What a blessing it is to have a cosmopolitan knowledge of men—and accents."

The compartment of the London train which he entered was empty, and no sooner was the station left behind than the solitary traveller justified Inspector Dimmock's title to be considered a keen observer in one respect, at any rate. He was certainly disguised. The day was warm, and the coal black head of hair quickly lay on the seat beside him, while he mopped a scantily furnished brow with his handkerchief.

"Yes," he continued to meditate, "the trip has been worth the investment, though this horrible tourist get-up did spoil a five-pound note. It will be a relief to get into unobtrusive professional black again."

And then, after a while:

"Kind of them to pull that shed down. Hay isn't exactly a plaster-cast, but still it tells tales sometimes to cleverer men than these. There may be someone else to reckon with yet."

CHAPTER VIII.

A Brave Girl's Choice.

Marion Standridge never wavered for an instant in the belief that her lover was innocent. From the moment when, stunned yet tearless she had returned to the house from the scene of his arrest in the rose garden at "The Limes," she had refused to listen to anyone who held a contrary opinion.

She had only known her father for a week, and, though she mourned his loss with genuine sorrow, the part that Cuthbert was accused of having played in the tragedy put all other considerations in the background. Mrs. Bonfield was worse than useless either as helper or sympathizer. The old lady was first hysterical and then unkind. As she recovered from the shock she began to see in Blakesly's arrest an obstacle to his depriving her of her indispensable companion, and selfishly took the worst view of his case.

It was not till after the inquest that Mrs. Bonfield found courage to let Marion see on which side she had ranged herself, and then it was more by innuendo than by direct assertion. But the half-dropped hints and suggestions were enough, and the relations between the two ladies were quickly becoming strained and uncomfortable. On the morning after the inquest they were sitting together, when Mr. Oakley, the bank manager, was announced—"to see Miss Standridge on business." As the visit was thus explicitly intended for Marion alone, Mrs. Bonfield would perhaps have shown better taste by leaving the room; but she preferred to assert her rights and remain where she was, jealously determined to protect what she considered her own interests.

"I was engaged all day yesterday at the inquest, or I should have called before," began the manager, when he had spoken a few commonplace, but none the less sincere, words of sympathy. "It is about your father's will, Miss Standridge. The document was drawn up and signed shortly after he came into these parts, and as he had no friends at that time, and was uncertain whether he should ever find you, he asked me to act as his executor. His principal reason, I presume, was that there were contingencies under which a local charity would benefit, and a local man would therefore be the most useful administrator."

"He has left his property to charities, then?" interrupted Mrs. Bonfield with an eagerness that caused Marion to look at her with pained surprise. The excitement of the last few days had broken down the silly old lady's sense of decency and restraint, and she could not conceal her selfish desire for her companion's continued dependence on her.

"Not under present circumstances," the manager replied, unfolding a paper, and handing it to Marion. "That is a copy of Mr. Standridge's will, and you will see that by it he devises to you everything of which he may die possessed. It was only failing your being discovered and properly identified within ten years of his death that his property was to go to the Reading Cottage Hospital. The latter provision has, of course, been rendered nugatory by his personal identification of you, so that you are beyond question in the position of sole legatee."

"But I understood that my poor father was robbed of his money by the villain who murdered him?" said Marion.

"Unfortunately there is too much reason to fear so," Mr. Oakley replied. "At any rate, as you know, it has not been found at Kennett's Cross. But there is still the chance that the police may trace and recover it."

"The police," exclaimed Marion, with bitter scorn, "*they* will never trace anything—least of all the murderer"

"Well," proceeded the manager, "in any case there is the freehold of the house and land, together with the sum of nearly three hundred and fifty pounds that was standing to his credit at the bank at the time of his death. It represents the balance that remained after those mysterious withdrawals, and it will be my duty to hold it at your disposal."

Mrs. Bonfield heaved a sigh of relief. Kennett's Cross she knew, had been on the market for years without finding a purchaser till Michael came, and it was practically valueless for letting purposes—would be doubly so now that it was the scene of a dreadful crime. The old farm house and the trifling amount in the bank would not suffice to make her protégée independent of her, she thought.

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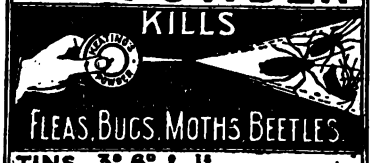

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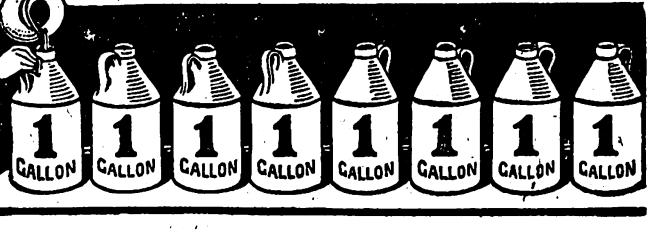

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"So you are not an heiress after all, Marion," she said viciously. "A father and a fortune lost to you, and yet you would fondle the hand that—"

"There, I think you had better say no more," interrupted Marion, curbing her indignation with an effort in which she was happily aided by the diversion of the bank manager's departure.

Having discharged his errand, and having no mind to stand much of Mrs. Bonfield's vapours, he rose to take his leave, and Marion, defiant in her wrath of the old lady's frowns, accompanied him to the front door. By doing so she gave Mr. Oakley an opportunity of winning her regard for ever in maintaining that, in spite of the evidence he had been compelled to give, he yet believed his cashier to be guiltless. She also became inspired with an idea, which had its consequences.

"There is something deeper here than these local wiseacres have been able to fathom," he said, as he stood on the doorstep. "The evidence at the inquest seemed to roll up against him in regular battalions—almost as if made to order—and yet I feel sure a clever brain would be able to get to the back of it. Some of it at least must be capable of innocent explanation. He simply couldn't have done it. Cuthbert Blakesly wouldn't hurt a fly."

Marion pressed his hand gratefully, and went sadly back into the house, pondering what he had said. "A clever brain," she murmured to herself. "Where am I to find such an one? And if I could, how should I be able to take advantage of it—penned up here with less freedom than the housemaid?" And all the rest of that day there rang in her ears the perpetual chorus: "A clever brain! A clever brain!"

The girl spent as much time as she could in her own room during those sad days. She wanted to avoid an open rupture with the querulous woman who, despite her selfishness, had certainly been her friend—for so long her only one. She had got so used to Mrs. Bonfield's "ways" that even now, within limits, she was willing to make allowances for her, and would have borne the mere unkindness to herself without complaint. But she would rather cut off her right hand than yield the tacit assent to the old lady's suspicions which acquiescence under present circumstances would imply.

On the afternoon of the day following the bank manager's visit, Marion had run away to her bedroom to snatch a little quiet, while Mrs. Bonfield enjoyed one of her innumerable siestas, and she had brought the newspaper with her—more from habit than because she had a mind for any news that did not concern her lover.

The inquest had been reported in the previous day's issue, so that there was nothing fresh about what had come to be known as the "Kennett's Cross case" but the negative statement that "the police were still hopeful of recovering the money which the murderer must have removed." Having already ascertained that there was nothing directly affecting Cuthbert, Marion let the paper lie unread for an hour before she took it up, and then only turned the pages idly without really heeding what her eyes rested on.

But at last a single word, staring at her from the middle of a short paragraph at the foot of a column, fixed her attention, and interwove itself into her present needs. The "item" was merely a brief statement to the effect that Zambra, the celebrated detective, had brought to a satisfactory conclusion the case upon which he had been engaged for a foreign Government, and, needless to say, there was nothing in that to interest her. It was the recollection that the name conveyed of a world-known murder mystery which had been solved by the same subtle brain a year before that made her cheeks tingle and a new light flash in her weary eyes.

"That is the man we ought to have," she exclaimed. "There is the clever brain Mr. Oakley spoke of. The skill with which he unravelled the terrible mystery of the 'Arab Javelin' almost amounted to second sight. Gladly would I give him every penny of that money in the bank if he would trace the murderer and prove Cuthbert's innocence. But how should I consult with him and see him privately here. Mrs. Bonfield would faint at the idea of a detective coming to the house, and she would never consent to my going to London for such a purpose. And would Cuthbert himself approve, I wonder."

The notion of employing the great detective took such hold of her that for the rest of that day she could think of little else, but up to bedtime she had been unable to devise a means of surmounting the initial difficulties, nor was she sure that she ought to act without first obtaining Cuthbert Blakesly's sanction. Throughout the evening, too, Mrs. Bonfield remained so irritable that it would have been more than ever useless to expect co-operation from her.

All the next day the moral atmosphere at "The Limes" continued in a highly electrical condition, but it was not till breakfast on the following morning—the fourth from the inquest—that the explosion came. After a more than usually unveiled expression of Mrs. Bonfield's suspicions, Marion started up from the table determined to bear it no longer.

"You have no right to speak to me like that about Cuthbert," she cried. "If I stay here another minute you will make me say what I should be sorry for. Even if you believe what you say—which I very much doubt—you would have been kinder to keep it to yourself. Gratitude demands a good deal from me, and I have striven to give it, but hardly that I should listen to these everlasting nagging accusations against the man I love. I shall leave your house at once."

"Oh, indeed, Miss, and pray where are you going—to live in your own beautiful country mansion, I suppose?" sneered the unpleasant old lady.

"I am going to the bank at Reading first, and shall consult Mr. Oakley," replied Marion. "If you wish to hear of my future movements you can do so through him."

Running up to her room, the girl packed her few belongings, intending to send for them later in the day, and soon came down dressed for walking. She could not bring herself to leave the house without saying good-bye to the woman whose bread she had eaten from childhood, and went to the morning-room for the purpose; but she was received with such a volley of abuse of herself and Cuthbert that she quietly shut the door again and went. Half-an-hour later Mrs. Bonfield, who judging others by her weak silly self had not thought the girl really meant to go, was lamenting in tears that she had precipitated the separation which she had wished to prevent.

In thus asserting her independence Marion was supported by the knowledge that she was not quite without the means for present subsistence. On leaving "The Limes" she went straight to the bank at Reading, and informing Mr. Oakley of the quarrel with her patroness, asked if it was open to her to draw on the funds in his hands. The will had not yet been proved, but the kindly manager at once made himself responsible for granting the facilities she required.

"And now you must allow Mrs. Oakley to look for lodgings for you in the town," he said, when the financial part of the business was concluded. "Just a bed and sitting-room, with some nice motherly person to see after your comfort."

But that was not the programme which Marion had mapped out for herself as she walked into the town. Strangely enough, it was Mrs. Bonfield herself who, in her cheap sarcasm, had suggested the course which now recommended itself in all sober earnestness.

"Thank you, very much," she replied, hesitating a little, because she knew that her project would meet with resistance, not from any faltering of purpose, "but I was thinking of another plan."

(To be continued.)

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An Open Letter

TO EVERY THOUGHTFUL MAN AND WOMAN.

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

WRITING from Richmond, "T. U. C. L." tells me he is in great trouble. His health giving out, he was obliged to give up his trade (that of a carpenter), and now, after a lapse of twelve months, he has been ordered to South Africa to prevent his chest from getting worse. He expects to be able to resume work in South Africa, but knowing nothing of the country would like to have some work guaranteed to him.

I am much afraid he will find it difficult to get such a guarantee in the present upset state of the country. But since the Cape is undoubtedly the finest place for him from a health point of view, it would, I should think, be worth his while to go out on "spec." As a capable artisan, he should be able to make a comfortable living out there. And, at any rate, when the war is over building work is sure to be plentiful. I wish him a speedy recovery, and the best of luck.

❦❦❦

"P. S." (Newark) believes there are employment agencies in London which make a speciality of getting clerkships, etc., for those in need of them, and wants to know their addresses.

I should advise my correspondent to be careful in his dealings with advertising employment agencies. Genuine, some are, no doubt, but others are bogus affairs which prey on the unwary by extracting preliminary and registry fees. "P. S." should write to the London Chamber of Commerce (Employment Bureau), stating his requirements. Perhaps that might lead to some satisfactory result. But why does "P. S." want to come to London at all? The clerking profession is utterly overcrowded, and every new competitor tends to lower salaries; and living is much more expensive in London than in the provinces.

❦❦❦

"Is it possible," writes "H. G. Y." (Highworth), "for a man to put a flat piece of steel an inch wide and about eighteen inches long down his throat? We have discussed the question, one party maintaining that it *can* be done after long practice and much pain, the other that it is impossible for it to go farther than the throat, and that it is not steel, but a material which collapses that the 'swallower' uses."

I believe the sword is actually swallowed by the expert. I remember once seeing a picture showing the passage of the blade between the various internal organs. But I am not sufficiently well acquainted with the subject to speak with decision.

Since the arrival of this query Sebastian (the office boy) has been practising the feat with the office poker with somewhat dire results. Several times he has been almost on the point of choking, but still he persists.

❦❦❦

To the number of readers of both sexes who have written me recently as to the choice of a bicycle, I would suggest that they have a look at the wares of the "Silver Queen" Cycle Company, 221 Tottenham Court Road, W. The "Silver Queen" for ladies, and the "Royal Ajax" for men are machines the superior of which would be difficult to manufacture. The finest materials are used, and for grace and beauty they are unsurpassable.

❦❦❦

"WANTS TO KNOW."—Shakespeare didn't write all the common sayings you mention, though he was responsible for many. I submitted your letter to our Quotation Editor. Here is his report:

To Shakespeare we owe "All is not gold that glisters," "Make a virtue of necessity," "Screw your courage to the sticking place" (not point). "They laugh that win," "This is the short and long of it," "Comparisons are odious," "As merry as the day is long," "A Daniel come to judgment," "Frailty, thy name is woman," and a host of others.

Thomas Murgan queried long ago, "What will Mrs. Grundy say?" while Goldsmith answers, "Ask no questions, and I'll tell you no fibs."

Thomas Tasser, a writer of the sixteenth century, gives us, "It's an ill mind that turns no good," "Better late than never," "Look ere you leap," and "The stone that is rolling can gather no moss."

"All cry and no wool" is found in Butler's "Hudibras."

Dryden says, "None but the brave deserve the fair," "Men are but children of a larger growth," and "Through thick and thin."

"When Greeks join Greeks, then was the tug of war."—Nathaniel Lee, 1692.

"Of two evils I have chosen the least," and "The end must justify the means," are from Matthew Prior.

We are indebted to Colley Cibber for the agreeable intelligence that "Richard is himself again."

"Variety is the very spice of life," and "Not much the worse for wear," Cowper; "Man proposes, but God disposes," Thomas à Kempis.

Christopher Marlowe gave forth the invitation so often repeated by his brothers in a less public way, "Love me little, love me long."

Edward Coke was of the opinion that "A man's house is his castle."

From Bacon comes "Knowledge is power," and Thomas Southern reminds us that "Pity's akin to love."

Dean Swift thought that "Bread is the staff of life."

Campbell found that "Coming events cast their shadows before," and "'Tis distance lends enchantment to the view."

"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever," is from Keats.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

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SHORT STORIES

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Out of the artist's daydream there stepped suddenly into the brilliant sunlight the only girl he could love, and the girl to whom he had never spoken. *See The Lady of Daisy Dingle.*

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THE LADY OF DAISY DINGLE.

CHAPTER I.

In their cool cycling dresses, their faces ruddy with health, their hair a trifle wind-blown, two girls looked charming as they spun along at a rattling rate.

Julia Mortimer's wilfulness had gained her the sobriquet of "Gipsy;" her delightful personality and the charm of her face and manner made her beloved by all around her, and being his only daughter she was her father's darling.

Cousin Madge was a pretty and clever girl of a more serious turn than Julia, no doubt partly due to the fact that she had been left an orphan in early years.

Her home had been at Locksley Hall since that sorrowful event, and the two girls had grown up together like sisters.

"I am going to have some of that lovely may-blossom, Madge," said Julia, as she slipped off her cycle, and propped it safely against a tree.

Then she scrambled amongst the thick growth of hawthorn trees on the hunt for blossom.

Madge accompanied her, and, peeping through the leafage, they beheld one of the most delightful landscapes their eyes had ever rested upon—a dingle surrounded with trees, and covered with ferns and wild-flower.

On a knoll, busily at work on a canvas around which bees buzzed in journeying from the flowering honeysuckle that hung in festoons at only a few yards distance, a young painter sat upon an artist's stool. He wore a loose tweed cycling dress and a huge wide-awake shaded his head from the sun.

With a sweeping, straw coloured moustache, blonde beard and fine profile, light curls straggling from his sombrero, he looked exceedingly handsome, and he had certainly with an artist's quick eye selected a most picturesque spot for the canvas.

"What do you think of him?" asked Julia.

"He is young and very handsome."

"He is certainly passable, Madge, but I'm going to give him a surprise."

A very gentle "Peek-a-boo!" came from behind the brambles.

The artist turned with a look of amazement. The call was repeated. He laid down his brush.

"Don't do it, Julia," said Madge.

But Gipsy Julia was aroused.

She thrust her head between a growth of honeysuckle, and said, defiantly:

"Yoicks! Tally-ho!"

The artist saw a very beautiful face framed one instant in flowers and greenery, then the girls withdrew in a great hurry, reached their cycles, mounted, and sped homewards at a record pace, Julia carrying a bunch of of may-blossom across her handle-bar.

When the painter reached the road, he saw them far in the dust of the distance. "It is the same face," he said in a dream of amazement, "that has haunted me so long. If it be real, and not a phantom that has come out of the leafage as beautifully and as strangely as the honeysuckle flowers have done, that is the face of the girl—the only girl I shall marry!"

CHAPTER II.

The Artist in Daisy Dingle.

"I think you treated him shamefully, Julia," said Madge.

"I wonder if I did?" the girl asked herself at intervals during the day, and finding no satisfactory answer she put the question to her brother Harry.

"If you were an artist," she said, "and you were painting a landscape hundreds of miles from here, and a roguish girl who happened to be passing put her face through the honeysuckle creepers and shouted 'Tally ho;' would it offend you?"

"It would all depend on the girl's face, if it were a very pretty one——"

"Madge's, for instance."

"That's an excellent idea of yours, Sis; we'll say Madge's. Well in that case I don't think I should be offended very much. At any rate I might easily be persuaded to forgive the intrusion and the audacity."

"You know I studied for the law, Sis," he said. "At least I am supposed to have done so, and I feel as though I had a wig and gown on when you come to me in this way. I won't charge you six-and-eightpence, but who is the artist fellow?"

It was Julia's turn to flush up now.

"I didn't say he really existed, did I? I merely put an ordinary question because it happened to strike me, I suppose."

"I see, a kind of chess problem. Then you're not seriously thinking of poking your head out among the bushes and disturbing the first painter you encounter by a foolish fox-hunting cry."

Julia turned away.

"I'm not going to stand any more of your chaff, Harry," she said.

"That's all right, but don't go, I want to talk about fashion plates and things. You know the visitors will be arriving to-morrow. Now I want to know what you two girls are going to wear. I should say the costumiers have been very busy from the file of bills Dad's got on hand."

"Harry, you are the quintessence of annoyance in some of your moods, and——"

"A jolly good fellow in others."

"Well, I'll give you credit for being good company now and again. Madge will do the same, I believe."

"I suppose I must, Julia."

"Oh, especially on moonlight nights, when——"

"If you go on any further, Sis, I'll ask you more questions about that artist fellow."

"Well I'm not afraid, but we'll cry a truce if you say that you never saw the dressmaking bills."

"I can't say that because you know I really did. It was quite accidental, though. I was turning over Sir Colville's papers, looking for a cheque that he had mislaid at the time. On my word of honour, I did not glance at the total."

"It wouldn't have mattered if you had done so. I shall wear pearl white silk and brocaded silver satin with chiffon frills, and Madge has a delicious tea-gown in heliotrope and green shot silk with ivory lace."

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"I have chosen an exquisite ball dress in cream satin with rare crocus lace; as for Madge she must speak for herself."

"The programme is as varied as the bills," laughed Harry. "I know you'll both look charming, and we're to have a flood of visitors. I have been expecting my old college chum, Lord Eustace Cranleigh, down for one, but Eustace always was a mysterious fellow, and I can't get a scrap of news about him. He's an artist to his finger tips, besides being a capital amateur actor, something of a poet, and a good musician. He delights in rambling about strange countries in all sorts of

A young painter sat upon an artist's stool. He wore a loose tweed cycling suit, and a huge wide-awake shaded his head from the sun.

strange ways, and I dare say you remember that book of his that was the sensation of the season a year ago, 'Through Morocco in disguise.'"

"I read it very eagerly," said Julia, "and I was deeply struck with his personality."

"It was certainly a charming book," said Madge, "and the illustrations were delightful."

"They were all pen and ink drawings of his own. Well, I was out with Eustace in the Mediterranean, as you know, and he promised for certain to spend two or three weeks with me here at Locksley Hall, Lionel accompanying him."

"Will he come?" asked the two girls together.

"That's just a question I can't answer. He's rambled away somewhere incognito, but his whereabouts are unknown, even to his brother. I should not wonder at his turning up, though."

"Do you still believe I acted shamefully to that painter in the wood?"

"Abominably," replied her cousin.

"Well, if I did," the beautiful brunette flashed out, "I'll—I'll tell him I didn't mean to."

"He was very handsome, wasn't he?" Madge said roguishly.

Now Julia had flushed crimson as Madge burst into rippling laughter.

"Tit for tat," she exclaimed, and Julia laughed, too.

* * * * *

The painter sat at his canvas in Daisy Dingle, as the picturesque little spot was called, but he sat idly this time. A day had passed, yet the painting had not progressed.

Having puffed at his briar pipe rather despondingly for some time, he produced a photograph from his pocket-book and gazed at it with a new look in his hazel-brown eyes.

It was the picture of a beautiful young girl, who bore a wonderful resemblance to Julia Mortimer.

"The face is the same," said the painter. "I cannot be mistaken in that. It is impossible. That I should meet her in sunny Devonshire was to be looked for, for where else could you find surroundings so charmingly suited to her delicate beauty. Well, I leave it all in the hands of Fate. Kismet has brought us together again, and, that being so, what shall separate us?"

Out of the artist's daydream there stepped suddenly into the brilliant sunlight the only girl he could love and the girl to whom he had never spoken.

Surely the face and form before him was that of Julia Mortimer, but she wore the ordinary homespun dress of a Devonshire country maiden, and she carried a sprig of fragrant may-blossom in her hand.

CHAPTER III.

AN ARTIST'S MODEL.

THE girl hesitated.

"I beg your pardon," she said.

The painter raised his wide-brimmed hat with a grace that told of high breeding.

"Please do not apologize. I am honoured by your presence, and you know I have no legal tenancy of Daisy Dingle." I only chose it because it is the most delightful and yet the most secluded spot I have found so far in your beautiful country."

"You have certainly chosen a charming spot for your canvas," she said. "I am Devonshire born, so I must thank you for the pretty compliment you have paid to us in words and in colours."

"I should be glad if you would appoint yourself my critic on this occasion," he said. "You know Devonshire so well, that you will see faults that would be less obvious to the ordinary person."

"If the function of a critic is to pick out faults, I am afraid I should make a very indifferent one," she said. "I have nothing but appreciation for your little work of art. Daisy Dingle is deliciously set in oils upon your little canvas."

"I don't think it's worthy of your praise," he said.

"It is worthy of being hung side by side with the best things in the Academy."

"Then you have been to the Academy?"

"That is scarcely possible for a Devonshire village girl," she said equivocally; "but I have read the notices and seen reproductions you know."

"You will pardon me saying that you get very little idea of the real pictures from them."

"But I have seen good pictures, and frankly, I admire yours immensely."

"Then I am more than repaid for having painted it. I had an idea of sending it in, but——"

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"You will do so!"

"No, I shall offer it to you!"

"For what reason, please?"

"Because—you like it."

"And you think I would accept it?"

"I shall be very disappointed if you do not—when it is finished."

"I should not think of doing so."

"But there would be conditions."

"I do not understand you."

"Well, you will forgive me if I say what I mean. I don't believe this picture of Daisy Dingle would ever get into the Academy, but I have one in my mind that would, if you consented to help it on a little."

"You may depend upon that."

"I hardly think so; in fact, I am half-afraid to ask you."

"But you must!"

"Well, when I first saw Daisy Dingle I thought it was an ideal spot—merely as it was then; but I am convinced of my mistake. There must be a figure in the canvas."

"Well?"

"That figure is a girl's, who carries may-blossom, and looks quite captivating enough to overcome the Academy judges, even if the painting scarcely did her justice."

"I think I see what you mean through your compliments. You would like me to pose as a model for your canvas."

"That is a very hard way of putting it. I do not ask the trees and the newly-blossomed hedgerows to pose, neither shall I you. The dingle is very beautiful, and if you will allow me to say so, you, too, are very beautiful. My poor brush would seek to set down your beauty in colour, and to draw around you the beauties of the Devonshire dingle."

"Then you wish to make me the central figure in your canvas?"

"I will not seek to hide that. Crowned with may-blossom I should paint you in the heart of the canvas, and my title would be, 'The Lady of Daisy Dingle.'"

"You think that it would be accepted?" she asked.

"I have confidence it would be one of the pictures of the year."

"I like to think of being your model," she said, "and I don't see why you need try to hide the fact that I should be a model. I should have some share in creating your work, I suppose."

"Believe me, you would be the real cause of its existence. If I had not met you——"

"Remember, I have not accepted yet," she flashed at him.

He smoothed his moustache. The Lady of Daisy Dingle was very capricious.

"Will you smoke a pipe whilst I think it out?"

He thanked her with a look.

"I like to see a painter smoke," she added.

Before he had advanced to meet her in the first instance he had thrust the photograph into his jacket pocket.

He put his hand to the cloth now to feel if it was safe, and buttoned the pocket over it. He would not have her discover that portrait for anything, yet he was convinced that it was hers.

He had smoked half-a-pipe of tobacco by the time she answered him.

"I will be the Lady of Daisy Dingle," she said simply.

He bowed.

"And you will accept my painting?"

"On one condition. That I approve of your second as being more likely to obtain a good position on the line. I refuse to believe that this would not be shown."

"It is very good of you," he answered.

"If I am to be your model I suppose you will want my name?"

"I am entirely at your mercy."

"I am a wanderer by habit, or else I should not have intruded upon you to-day. You may call me 'Gipsy.'"

"I have not a card upon me," he said somewhat confusedly, "but——"

"I would like you to give me only a name to know you by," she said.

"Would Stacy do?" he asked smilingly. "I have some right to it."

"Very well indeed."

They arranged a meeting for the morrow, and he accompanied her some way down the high road.

He returned to his easel, took up his brush, painted furiously till well on in the afternoon, putting the finishing touches on to the canvas, and then addressing the picture, said:

"Good-bye to you for a while, my friend. Before I place you in her hands I must touch you up a little more, but for a time you will find seclusion at my room in the little Devonshire inn. To-morrow I bring out the new canvas. If I can paint all that is in my heart I shall astonish the R. A's, for I love Gipsy, and against all the world I will win her to be my bride."

* * * * *

Meanwhile all was stir and bustle at the Hall. Several of the guests had arrived, but Lord Eustace Cranleigh was not among them. Julia had determined, after all, to wear the family jewels at the ball, and taking Madge into the conspiracy she set about winning her father's consent. The two of them obtained the key of the jewel safe and Julia decorated herself with the stones by Madge's assistance. Sir William Mortimer was alone at the time Gipsy Julia came into the library with a tiara of rubies and diamonds intertwined with her dark hair; she wore a necklace of costly pearls, and gold bracelets set with very valuable gems.

She had chosen the choicest jewels the Mortimer family boasted, in her wilful desire to adorn her beauty and to march into her father and storm the castle, as she called getting his consent.

Her mischievous face looked bewitching in its setting of dusky hair and glittering stones. Cousin Madge stole behind her in some trepidation; she did not know exactly how Sir William would greet them when they had broken through the partition of the study door. Julia's wilfulness had gained her the sobriquet of "Gipsy" as we have said, but however her moods were, she seemed always to carry them victoriously through.

Gipsy Julia pushed aside the door, and came into the library.

"It's a bit theatrical, dad, I know, but don't you think the effect is delightful?"

Sir William looked up from his books in blank astonishment. He had to own to himself, though, that he had never seen jewels worn to such advantage before. The array of precious stones was a revelation to him.

"Don't stop to consider, dad, do I not look ravishing?"

"I suppose if I acknowledge that, I shall lay myself open to other surprises of the kind as my lady's caprice

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prompts her. How in the world did you obtain the jewels? I thought they were safe in the strong box."

"So they were, but I am a very desperate young lady when I set about doing a thing. I stole keys and passed through winding corridors to achieve my purpose."

"I helped Julia all I could, so I must take a share in the blame uncle," laughed Madge.

"I don't think anyone could resist helping the girl if she desired it," said Sir William.

In Daisy Dingle the picture was progressing famously.

It is useless to try and hide from the acute reader any longer that the artist's model in the dress of a Devonshire village girl was Gipsy Julia. The day after

Julia turned away.

her cycling adventure, being rather disturbed at cousin Madge's continual reminder that she had behaved shamefully to the unknown painter, Julia had sought to make amends in a way of her own.

She assumed the gown and straw hat of a Devonshire village maiden, and sought the better acquaintance of the painter in Daisy Dingle. How she consented to become the model for an Academy picture we have told in a previous chapter.

She posed in a wilful way that secretly delighted "Mr. Stacy," since it gave exactly the effect he was seeking after.

The fact is the artist was infatuated with his model, and he did not stop to think that this was dangerous work he was engaged on, since he was using the palette of his heart to supply the colours he needed.

He worked feverishly at the canvas, begrudging the time that it took to moisten the brushes, and under his deft fingers an ideal Julia began to appear in an ideal Daisy Dingle.

There was the fascination of genius in the canvas. Beautiful as Julia was the artist had intensified those points that were strangest in her face, and one saw the charming personality of the girl at a glance—and as for Daisy Dingle upon this canvas, it was a revel of tangled foliage and blossom.

The picture absorbed Mr. Stacy, and his wonderful energies frightened Julia. She feared for a breakdown, and she found herself speculating sadly, not on the fate of the picture, but the fate of the man.

He said very little whilst he worked, and that period of silence gave Julia time for thought.

But why did she use the word "unknown." She found herself despising herself for that word. She understood him to the heart's core; she read his soul through his painting, and through his sparkling hazel eyes.

Another thought came and frightened her at the time, but afterwards she clung to it with desperation. Her only happiness seemed to be in cherishing it.

She loved this Mr. Stacy, this painter she had found like a fairy prince in the woods.

Hour by hour she found herself speculating on their next meeting. The visitors had arrived at Locksley Hall, and she found some trouble in evading them, but she took a roundabout way in her rustic dress to avoid them.

She found the utmost difficulty, too, in eluding Madge; plainly the girl suspected her of some strange vagary of late, but she little thought of this.

Her last had been to obtain permission to wear the jewels at the ball from her father.

She cared little about the jewels and nothing about the ball now.

She had to mix with her father's guests to a certain extent, but she always contrived to excuse herself before the hour of meeting "Mr. Stacy."

The day of the ball arrived.

At noontide Julia was again in Daisy Dingle, and the painter worked less eagerly now, for the picture was nearing completion.

Suddenly he threw down his wet brush.

The girl was watching him intently,

Did this portend what she had been fearing—the end of their acquaintance.

"It is finished," he said; "that is all that can be done in the open air. Careful studio touches are required now, but the work is done."

"Finished!" the girl echoed sadly.

"I have your beauty alone and the wonderful background of Daisy Dingle to thank for this canvas. Miss 'Gipsy,' you will stare the world in the face at the Academy."

"Do you think I care for that?" replied the girl, rather hollowly.

"No—but I do."

"It is the production of your brush."

"That is not why. Because it is the faithful portraiture of your face, that is why I admire it so. I shall become famous by your beautiful face. The world will remember my picture because I have had the most charming girl in England for my model. From London I shall send you the canvas you promised to accept, suitably framed."

"You are going away?"

"Yes, but it rests with you entirely whether I go

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away happy at heart or heartbroken. This painting is nothing to me unless I possess your love, too. Do you not know why this picture is so beautiful—why I have amazed you and myself by producing a work that must live whilst art endures? It is because I love you passionately and fondly. I have dreamt of you often before we met. Believe me, this is no chance acquaintance. Love's hand has turned the wheel of Fate for us. 'Gipsy,' will you be my bride?"

The girl turned away from him.

Her lips were parched. She could not frame an answer.

Her own soul told her this was the only man she could marry on earth, but her head sang and danced and her heart throbbed wildly. She must gain time.

He was too impulsive. She must think well over what he had said. Poor wilful Julia was beset by a score of strange doubts and fancies.

"Mr. Stacy," she gasped. "I cannot answer you now, please do not press me to."

He regarded the working of her face.

"To-night," he said, with a strange firmness, "I go to London never to return to Devonshire, if I do not have your answer. Greater love than I offer you has no man. In proof to this, hear me. I have sought you through Venice, guided only by this portrait."

He held a photo to the light and she saw in amazement that it was one of her own.

"I have found you in Devonshire, and I have lived to put your face upon canvas. If I fail to win your heart to-night, I care nothing for what happens further. I shall renounce Art. Your picture will hang in this year's Academy, but it will be unsigned. I shall send it only because I have promised it to you."

"Mr. Stacy," she pleaded, "you will give me a few hours."

"That is not love that requires consideration," his eyes told her, but she pleaded on.

They arranged to meet under the Pilgrim Beeches between Locksley Hall and Daisy Dingle at eight o'clock in the evening; then they parted and she refused his escort. Her head was burning and her heart throbbed painfully, yet throughout all her strange excitement, one exultant thought ran. He loved her and at last she knew it. An hour passed. The artist still sat in front of his canvas, but he had skilfully fastened a green baize curtain across his easel so that the painting was hidden.

How would "Gipsy" answer his question?

Had he anything to hope for?

He was asking himself this question for about the hundredth time when the trees behind parted and a young man with a gun in hand entered Daisy Dingle. It was Harry Mortimer, alone.

He made a gesture of amazement on seeing the artist and came straight towards him trailing his gun.

The artist turned.

"Well, Harry," he said.

"That's cool, to say the least of it, Eustace; and is this where you have been rusticating the last month?"

"It's about a fortnight since I first entered Daisy Dingle, I believe."

"And you promised to join us at Locksley Hall. Sir Lionel's been there days."

Lord Eustace Cranleigh, known for some time in our story as plain "Mr. Stacy," looked contrite.

"So I did, Harry; but like Dr. Syntax, I've been in search of the picturesque, and I think I've found it."

"There's little doubt of that, but what an erratic fellow you are Eustace—artist, sportsman, everything else on earth. By the way, does that box contain some of those famous tongue sandwiches we had on the Mediterranean?"

"I'm happy to say it does—though not of the same date, for in that case, they'd rival railway sandwiches. I made them up at the Sea-View Inn this morning—I must confess that's where I'm stopping."

Lord Eustace offered Harry some of the dainties, and laying on the grass the young fellow munched them with evident approval.

"You'll be staying with us at Locksley Hall to-night," he exclaimed.

"I don't think so; in fact, I have business in London."

"If the guv'nor gets to know you're here, he'll never let you leave without paying us the promised visit. Why, old fellow, to-night's the ball of the season."

Harry stood up now and drew aside the green baize.

"You don't object to me looking at your canvas?" he said.

He fell back in absolute amazement upon seeing Julia's face so beautifully set in colours among the picturesque trees of Daisy Dingle.

"What does it all mean?" he asked.

"I don't follow you."

"How have you done such a fine picture of Julia?"

"Julia—who?"

Lord Cranleigh's interjection was ungrammatic, but he was puzzled.

"Why, my sister Julia, of course."

Lord Cranleigh produced a photograph.

"That is the young lady I've painted."

"I know that. It's Julia; and that's the identical photo of her I lost at Nice."

Lord Eustace Cranleigh started.

"That's where I found it," he said. "Sit down Harry and have a smoke."

CHAPTER IV.

Julia had to attend the ball at Locksley Hall in the evening. Her heart was restless and she would have given much to be free.

She dressed in company with Madge, and was quite forgetting the jewels she had meant to wear. Her cousin brought them from the safe and adorned her with them until her hair gave out a wild glitter, and her neck and bodice sparkled with beautiful gems.

"They look wonderful!" said Madge, and Julia's maid gasped for breath when the girl stood forward in all the glory of the Mortimer gems.

Gipsy Julia stood with flushed face in front of the long mirror, and Madge of course attributed her excitement to the new sensation of wearing the Mortimer jewels.

But it was quite another matter that engaged Julia's mind. "I love him, I love him," she kept repeating under her voice.

Plainly the painter of Daisy Dingle had a good chance of winning Gipsy Julia's heart after all. When she appeared in the ballroom the girl attracted all the attention.

Harry kept a keen watch upon his sister, but he could not help remarking to himself, knowing her moods so well:

"I think Stacy stands a fine chance of winning this

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set. It's about a certainty. Well, the dear old fellow will be a most estimable brother-in-law."

After a deal of perseverance he found Lord Cranleigh in the grounds, and prevailed on him to stroll up to the French windows opening on the lawn. Here they had a full view of the ballroom. As they stood within the shadows, an entrancing melody rippled through the windows as though to charm the starlight from the skies.

But Lord Cranleigh was not listening.

He had caught sight of Julia in all her wealth of flashing jewels, and his heart beat tumultuously. Yet here in her father's hall and amongst her compeers in position and birth, she was not more beautiful to him than she had been on the first occasion they met when she wore her Devonshire village dress. No, he loved her best as the simple Lady of Daisy Dingle.

And then he stole away from the window, and when Harry Mortimer sought to speak with him, he was nowhere to be found.

And how did Julia fare? She was thinking how best to escape from the ball-room unobserved, that she might keep tryst under the Pilgrim Beeches. The inanities of a ball-room butterfly were boring her to distraction, and she was racking her brains how to get rid of him decently, when she caught sight of Madge, and with a hurried "excuse me!" ran after her little cousin.

"Oh, Madge," said Julia, "I have something to tell you; will you accompany me to my room?"

"Why, whatever can be the matter, you look so wild and strange. I actually thought you were going to strike that young Grayling just now. You looked like a tigress robbed of her offspring."

Julia coloured and laughed.

"I must tell you all, dear," she said, "for I want your help."

And then the lovely girl poured her full secret into the willing ears of Madge. At first the quiet girl refused to have anything to do with such a wild undertaking, but she had to give way to the eager protestations of Gipsy.

A woollen shawl and a sun-bonnet were soon found, and under this disguise and favoured by the night Julia stole out by a corridor door like Dorothy Varden of old, and made her way to Pilgrim Beeches, where her lover was impatiently awaiting her.

It was a glorious starlight night and the moon would shortly rise, and Julia, impatient of delay, sped through the woods of her father's estate. And now she neared the beeches; she could see the man she adored pacing backwards and forwards. Another step, and with a little fluttering cry she was in his arms. The moon was rising and cast her silver beams athwart the glades, and there was a ghostly look and silence all around.

"Are you sure you love me? How can you? It was only the other day that we met?"

The man's answer was not given in words, but the girl spoke no more of doubt. And yet she thought she was engaged to plain Mr. Stacy.

"My father will never consent to the match," she said in her innocence. "I believe he had thoughts of my marrying a Lord Cranleigh, who was to have visited us, but who, I am thankful to say, never turned up."

Her companion actually laughed, and, after chasing away her look of amazement with a kiss, he enlightened her as to the true state of affairs.

"But I shall never be able to trust you again, you deceitful thing," she pouted; but the knowledge that she had won a title as well as true love did not detract from the sweetness of the conquest, and they strolled together to the hall to receive the paternal blessings.

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Short Stories That . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, May 20th. Post-cards only, please. The prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. H. Cross, of East Street, Alresford, Hants, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

"IT is you women who make all the trouble in life." "Yes, and who make life worth the trouble."

"MISS BINKS hasn't a particle of social instinct." "What do you mean?" "Why, when she is invited to lunch, she talks more than the girl who is to pay the bill."

"WHAT, you call me pretty? Why, I am an old woman, my hair is turning white, and look, here is a wrinkle!" "A wrinkle! No, madam, it is a smile that has drifted from its moorings!"

"I DUNNO," said Farmer Corntossel, "but what I'd kind of enjoy running a rice farm over in China." "Why, you'd be a Chinaman." "Yes. But it would be somethin' of a comfort to live in some place where your predictions that the country was goin' to pieces stood some chance of comin' true."

YOUNG WIFE: "Then you won't fulfil this trifling request of mine?" Husband: "Not on any account!" The wife silently brings out a phonograph, which, on being set in motion, pronounces audibly the following words: "Dearest Agnes, when once we are married, I will do my utmost to carry out every wish I can read in your eyes!"

"I DON'T stoop to vulgarity, sir," said the irate visitor to the editor. "Yes, I had observed that," responded the editor cheerfully. "I'm glad you have, sir." "Don't mention it," begged the editor blandly. "I am sure a person of your character would never stoop to vulgarity." "No, sir, no——" "No, of course not," interrupted the editor, "he would have to reach up to it."

A SWANSEA lawyer noticed the other evening that his youthful son, who was studying arithmetic, seemed very restless. Getting impatient the father broke out: "What on earth ails you? Why can't you sit still—wriggling about every minute?" "It's all your fault," murmured the boy. "Why is it?" "'Cos I asked you last night how much a billion was and you said it was a thundering lot! The teacher asked me the same question to-day, and I said what you told me. That is why I can't keep still."

"MR. CRIMSONBEAK, will you show me your chickens if I come down to your house some day?" asked little Johnny Yeast of that gentleman, the other evening, when he and his wife were calling at the Yeast residence. "Why, Johnny, I don't keep chickens," replied Mr. Crimsonbeak, gently patting the boy on the head; "what made you think I did?" "Why, whenever I hear mamma mention your name, she always calls you the hen-pecked husband; but I can't see how you can be hen-pecked if you don't keep any chickens." Johnny suddenly vanished from the room, and took his father's elevator for the garret.

AN irritable old bachelor says that women are like cats; both are graceful, both are domestic, and—some scratch.

"I UNDERSTAND you were well off before you married?" said the lawyer. "Yes," replied the witness, "but, like a fool, I didn't know it."

BERTHA: "I'm sorry you asked me to marry you. It pains me to refuse." Will (cheerfully): "Oh, don't worry. Perhaps you know best what I'm escaping."

MRS. NEWWED: "What! You have no income but your salary? You told me you had money to burn!" Mr. Newwed: "Well, I've just paid for a ton of coal, haven't I?"

YOUNG HUSBAND: "Yes, dear, you look nice in that dress; but it cost me a lot of money." Young Wife: "Dick, dear, what do I care for money when it is a question of pleasing you?"

POSTMAN (to boarding-house maidservant): "Here's a letter for Mr. Jeremiah O'Flatherty." Servant: "Well, 'tis the clever man ye are to know his name, sure, he only kem here last night!"

"WHAT's the matter with you?" asked the sympathetic friend; "an attack of grip?" "No; this isn't grip. I haven't time to stay at home and send for a doctor. This is simply a bad cold."

TEACHER (to his class): "What is a jewel?" First Boy: "A precious stone, sir." Teacher: "What is a precious stone?" Second Boy: "A stone that is worth a great deal of money." Teacher: "Name me one?" Second Boy: "A tombstone, sir."

UGLY CUSTOMER: "What price did you say this cape was?" Pretty Milliner: "Seven guineas, madam." Ugly Customer (after a pause): "Don't you think it rather a dreadful figure?" Pretty Milliner: "Well, madam, since you say so, it is not the best I have seen—but I think you'll find the cape will hide it!"

AN old countryman was in Liverpool on the day that the men of Strathcona's horse were to pass through the city on their way home. Not knowing for what reason so many people were waiting about in the streets, he made inquiries, and on being told that they were waiting to see Strathcona's Horse pass by, he said: "Well, I'm jiggered! It mun be a mighty fine 'oss for so many people to come to see it go by!"

A HUNGRY tourist had put up for the night at a wayside inn and found the supper rather scanty, the most substantial part of it being a single sausage. With a fault-finding look and gesture he called the innkeeper to his side. "Is this the best you can do in the way of a sausage?" asked the traveller. "Why, now," said the host, "isn't it good enough?" "Oh, it's good enough, perhaps, but the ends don't suit me." "The ends! What's the matter with them?" "Too near together," said the hungry man. And the innkeeper took the hint.

* AT the conclusion of the assizes at a certain northern town the legal luminaries indulged in a cricket match. A certain well-known judge presently occupied the wicket, and so persistently did he display the stone-walling tactics that his opponents despaired of getting him out. After a futile appeal of "leg before," the judge said to the umpire: "I wonder if I am to be imprisoned here until the next assizes?" He had hardly spoken when an extra fast one removed the cross-pieces. "No, my lord," replied the umpire, with a sly grin, "you are bailed out."

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A KEEPER OF SECRETS.

THE PAPER IN THE BUHL CABINET.

Of the many problems placed before Hugo Pontifex during his singular professional career, the one which admitted of the least delay in its solution was that submitted by the beautiful Mrs. Marsham.

Mrs. Cornelius Marsham, at the time of her call upon Mr. Pontifex, had figured for some three years as the newest and smartest of Society dames. A mansion in Park Lane, a villa at Cowes, a castle in Scotland, a husband on the Stock Exchange, these were a few of her fashionable qualifications. In addition, she had planned a huge bazaar, entertained Royalty, and "discovered" a popular tenor. When, therefore, the usual curt announcements informed the world that Helen Marsham had been left a widow, not a few people asked themselves, with more cynicism than good taste, "Who'll be her next, and how soon will it come off?"

Although the questioners might have learnt the fact with some surprise, the answer to this enigma depended, for some sixteen hours or so, upon the redoubtable Hugo Pontifex. He was, indeed, consulted by Mrs. Marsham on the very day of her husband's death.

Despite her black skirts, dark cloak, and thick veil, the solicitor recognised in the delicate profile and elastic frame, a client of wealth and distinction. Sitting down, at his request, by the heavy oak table near the window, she put up the close net which screened her features—they were both lovely and animated.

"Mr. Pontifex," she said, "are you a fit adviser for those who, before coming to you, have lost hope?"

The lawyer was struck by the directness and daring of the query.

"I believe I am," he responded, "I can honestly say that I do not often prove scrupulous about means, so long as the end in view is legitimate."

Mrs. Marsham glanced shrewdly at the speaker.

"So you read thoughts," she commented, "would you could annihilate written ones, and through steel walls!"

"Nothing is impossible, madam," observed Hugo Pontifex blandly, "but I do not recommend my clients to talk in riddles—it wastes time."

His visitor flushed; the hint was almost too broad.

"You are right," she owned, embarrassed by Mr. Pontifex's irony, "and I beg your pardon. I will be brief. My name you already know; my address, for the present, is Namaqua House, Park Lane. I am the wife, or, rather, the widow, of Cornelius Marsham, the South African Railway King."

"Who, so far from being dead," said the lawyer drily, "presided last night over a hospital dinner at the Hotel Cecil."

"And who," completed the other, "on his arrival home, was seized by an attack of suppressed gout, and died this morning at five o'clock. My presence here is due to that catastrophe."

Hugo Pontifex bent his head, but offered no apology for the insinuation by which he had brought Mrs. Marsham to the point.

"My husband," said his client, "was, it is notorious, a rich and uncultured speculator. He had made, and lost, several fortunes in the Colonies. His had been a rough life, and much of it he would not have had published for untold millions. His most dangerous secret—the history of his connection with a huge and profitable bank fraud—he imagined to be in his exclusive keeping. Two years ago, however, a man appeared on the scene, who was aware of certain facts which would have incriminated Cornelius, had they been disclosed. This fellow, a French emigrant, Jules Lemaire, bled my husband mercilessly, under threats of exposure. A drunken, foul-mouthed boor, he accompanied us everywhere, and turned our existence into a veritable inferno."

The lawyer twisted his sapphire ring; the impending shadow of some violent act seemed to chill the warmth of the April sunbeams that flooded St. James' Street and penetrated even to Mr. Pontifex's private apartment.

"At last," pursued Helen Marsham, sternly, "the inevitable result occurred. Cornelius turned upon Lemaire. Beside himself with rage and champagne, he shot his persecutor through the back as they were drinking in the billiard-room at Park Lane. The revolver was small, and the explosion unheard by the servants. Sobered with alarm, Cornelius fled for me. I hastened to the spot, Lemaire was speechless and evidently dying."

Mrs. Marsham caught her breath—the recollection of the tragedy she had described swept over her with sudden force. Hugo Pontifex pushed a revolving stand in a piece of furniture at his elbow. A decanter slid into view, with a syphon and glasses. The solicitor tilted a small quantity of the spirit into a tumbler, diluted it with soda, and set it before his client. She sipped the mixture tremblingly.

"In the midst of my distress and terror," she went on, "I had an idea. As a girl, I had been acquainted with a young medical student, Edmund Cochrane. He—he loved me, and, to be honest, I returned his love. But I was powerless; my mother exerted great influence upon me, and I married Cornelius Marsham. For a considerable period we resided at the Cape."

Hugo Pontifex sighed; he liked to believe in women and such stories of disloyalty pained him.

"From letters which reached me," said Helen Marsham, relinquishing the glass she had been holding; "I had gathered that Edmund, though a brilliant Cavendish Square physician by now, continued a bachelor, and wondered if it were constancy or pique. When I heard of the dreadful scandal that hung over us, I sent for him, explained all, and begged him, for my sake, to save Cornelius' reputation. My tears mastered his judgment, he consented to aid us. Lemaire was dumb, the bullet had injured his spine; we got him to bed and Edmund and I nursed him for a month. Then he died; Dr. Cochrane signed a false death-certificate, and he was buried."

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The circlet of gold on Mr. Pontifex's finger slipped round and round; he was listening intently.

"There was no reason," proceeded his client; "why things should not have gone on smoothly after that. But Cornelius grew jealous of Edmund—Dr. Cochrane—and discovering that he himself had but a short while to live—his drinking habits had excited a constitutional ailment—devised a horrible scheme to prevent my marrying the doctor, if I should become a widow."

"May I infer your willingness to contract such a marriage?" interpolated the solicitor.

Mrs. Marsham trifled with her watch-chain.

"I suppose I must tell the truth," she faltered; "yes, I would have accepted Edmund had he asked me. I never cared for Cornelius, nor has money reconciled me to my splendid fate. Why should I not be happy? I would have taken Edmund immediately I was free, and Cornelius realized it."

"You *would* have," repeated Hugo Pontifex, emphasizing the second word. "What is the obstacle? Will the doctor not renew his suit in due season, or has Mr. Marsham's device succeeded?"

Helen Marsham shuddered.

"It has not, yet," she replied; "but it will—if you cannot help me. And it will not only separate me for ever from the man I love, it may send him to a felon's cell. You are a lawyer, Mr. Pontifex, you should remember that an accessory subsequent to the fact in murder may receive a term of penal servitude."

Hugo Pontifex meditated.

"What is this scheme of your husband's?" he inquired.

Mrs. Marsham blanched.

"To betray Cochrane to the authorities," she answered; "by a paper that, his will directs, is to be produced after the funeral from a buhl cabinet in his bed-chamber, the key of the cabinet being in his solicitor's possession. The document is to be read to the mourners present and forwarded to the Commissioner of Police. This paper, as Cornelius had the effrontery to inform me, records the murder of Jules Lemaire and Dr. Cochrane's assistance in hiding it. The confession, though not evidence against Edmund, would place the authorities on the track of indisputable proof; the bullet shattered Lemaire's spine and was never extracted. Exhumation could not fail to demonstrate—even after an interval of two years—the falsity of the death-certificate."

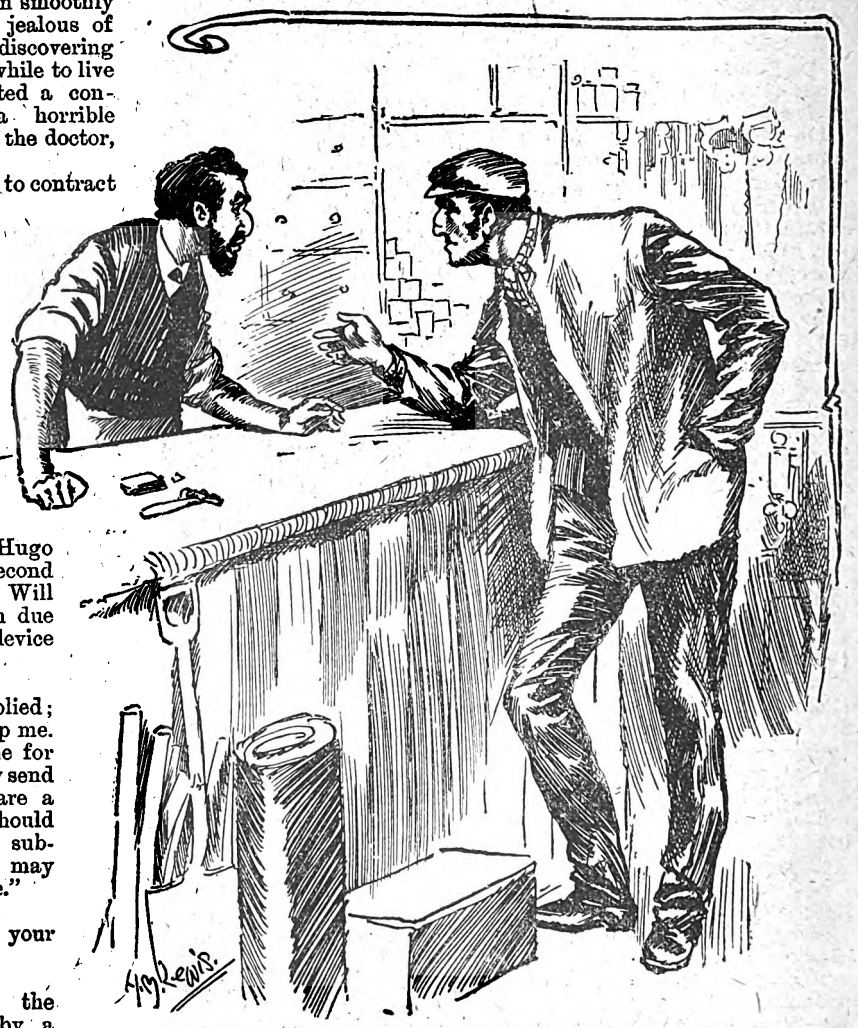
"Did you not weigh," demanded Mr. Pontifex, "the advisability of destroying the confession, prior to Mr. Marsham's death, or just afterwards?"

"Yes," said Helen Marsham; "but before he died he used to look at the paper each evening he was in town and chuckle over it. The compartment held nothing else, and it was thrown in loosely as if to tempt me. Yet had I sought to abstract and burn it he would have had tangible grounds for his jealousy—which, so far, only rested upon my old flirtation with Edmund—and could have replaced the confession forthwith. This morning I hurried to the cabinet, and unlocked the section whence I had seen him take the paper. He had laid a trap to mock me! There were double doors to the compartment—the outer of wood and brass, the inner of steel, joined to steel linings. That portion of the cabinet is really a strong safe, clamped to the joists of the flooring. My husband's key for the inner door I cannot find; he has concealed it too effectively."

Hugo Pontifex pursed his expressive lips.

"It is a tight corner," he allowed.

"If it were not," was the cool retort, "would I have troubled you?"



Much earnest persuasion was requisite before the Jew trader would consent to be satisfied of his visitor's good faith.

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The lawyer gazed into the sapphire depths of his favourite jewel.

"What time to-night," he asked, "can you admit me—unseen, excepting by yourself—to the chamber where this cabinet is situated?"

Mrs. Marsham pondered.

"It would not be quite prudent until nearly two o'clock," she decided; "I will arrange to sit up alone with—*it*."

The wife of the dead railway magnate shivered as she pronounced the syllable which stood for his unconscious clay.

Mr. Pontifex marvelled at the courage and intelligence that prompted the suggestion. But he reminded himself that Helen Marsham was in love with Edmund Cochrane, and that for the prosperous physician both honour and liberty hung upon the issue of Hugo Pontifex's manœuvres.

"Very well," he said; "expect me at two o'clock."

"May I ask what you propose doing?" inquired Helen Marsham, an uncontrollable doubt revealing itself in her face.

"The one thing necessary," vouchsafed the solicitor; "to annihilate your husband's malignant confession."

"But the safe is locked and fireproof," objected the other. Mr. Pontifex rose formally.

"The commission is yours, the method mine," he said, and rang for her to be shown out. His client drew down her veil, fastened her cloak, and departed, a striking yet anxious figure.

"That is not a frequent type of woman," remarked Hugo Pontifex, as he crossed to his wardrobe-closet and began to attire himself in the shabbiest of his costumes. His sympathy for Helen Marsham was eclipsed, nevertheless, by his pleasure at the difficulty of the riddle with which he had, after a fashion, already grappled.

Leaving St. James' Street, he drove eastwards to the fringe of the London docks and alighted in a wide but squalid thoroughfare. From this he walked deliberately into a maze of odorous little streets.

Halting, at length, before a nondescript shop, half ironmonger's, half marine-store dealer's, he strode over the dusky threshold.

A ringleted Jew shuffled to meet the lawyer, and Mr. Pontifex, abandoning his usual crisp English, relapsed into a jargon of which his aristocratic friends would have comprehended but an occasional word. He was using the peculiar back-slang of the expert criminal.

Much earnest persuasion was requisite before the Jew trader would consent to be satisfied of his visitor's good faith. Finally a rouleau of sovereigns passed from palm to palm, and Hugo Pontifex was able to slip into the pockets of his brown coat an array of glittering metal oddments.

Among them were a quartette of bars made to join, by stout screws or by hooked ends, into a square frame. Upon one side of this frame was a swivelled socket, operated by a powerful lever.

Ballasted with his new acquisitions, Hugo Pontifex returned to his office, and, by the entrance at its rear, visited his private apartment. Depositing his equipment in a corner, he sallied out once more, completed a strange series of purchases in Soho, and regaining his room, substituted for his villainous clothes an elegant evening suit.

Dinner and the theatre disposed of his leisure, and, in the second of the small hours, having donned his shabby garments and laden himself with the articles collected for the expedition, Mr. Pontifex, by devious routes, attained the locality of Park Lane. Upon the stroke of two, the massive portals of Namaqua House, which he had been patiently observing, opened, and the disguised lawyer darted in as silently as a phantom might have done.

A vague form, whose determined grace proclaimed it that of Helen Marsham, was waiting within the hall-way, it glided along the corridor and Mr. Pontifex followed it. Up an ample flight of stairs the solicitor marched—his footsteps noiseless upon the soft pile of the luxurious carpets.

His escort's goal was a large chamber on the first storey—a chamber lighted only by a shaded lamp.

Mrs. Marsham piloted him into the room and secured the latch. She was clad in a costly dressing-gown of heliotrope silk, through whose loose sleeves her white arms showed firm and supple. By the subdued glow that filled the place, Hugo Pontifex perceived a still and sheeted outline on the curtained bed.

Dismissing the melancholy reflections which crowded upon him, the lawyer arranged, in a species of scientific order, the different parts of the apparatus he had brought. His client contemplated his actions.

"You are going to try and break into the safe," she

Hugo Pontifex perceived a still, sheeted outline on the curtained bed.

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observed abruptly. "It is useless; the name of the maker will convince you of that."

Hugo Pontifex frowned. "Madam," he answered her, "I am not in the habit of leaving any contingency unprovided for. Have the kindness to show me the buhl cabinet."

Helen Marsham touched the shade over the lamp and a band of light fell athwart the floor. It illuminated a fine rosewood antique, narrow and upright, with characteristic brass ornamentation. Mrs. Marsham unlocked one of the lower compartments. As she had said, the front was double, a tiny safe had been fitted into that section of the cabinet.

The lawyer sought to remove the cabinet, but it resisted—it was bolted to the floor by means of the safe. The prevision of Cornelius Marsham had been thorough.

Quietly Mr. Pontifex thrust behind the wooden casing a short iron bar, unscrewed and removed the front of the compartment, constructed a square frame about the base of the cabinet, fixed a drill to the swivelled socket and began to work the lever. He had set the tool at a downward angle, adjusted it to the steel door of the safe, and muffled the ratchets in a borrowed cushion.

For a couple of hours he plied the bar which revolved the drill. At the end of that time he had pierced a single hole in the plates of the safe—it penetrated the fireproof packing and the interior wall of the steel chest. He paused, substituted a bigger drill, and started to increase the width of the bore.

"Let me," murmured Helen Marsham, "I am stronger than you think."

The lawyer yielded the lever to her, and she toiled on in silence, with the lamp burning steadily and the dead man for an impassive witness. Of all the experiences that had been permitted to Hugo Pontifex, this was fated to dwell the longest in his memory.

When the piercing was enlarged from the diameter of a knitting-needle to that of a lead pencil, Mr. Pontifex motioned to his assistant, and she suspended her labours.

The solicitor had taken up a transparent funnel with a thin stem. This he inserted at the orifice left by the drill, and thrust it forward. It disappeared up to the expanding mouth. Drawing a deeper breath as he discovered the satisfactory nature of the bore, Mr. Pontifex emptied into the funnel a packet of powdered crystals and forced them through the tube by means of a wire.

"You will not risk an explosion, surely?" queried his client. The lawyer's sole response was a grimace of vexation—nothing irritated him more than questions which impugned his practical wisdom.

Picking up a phial with a glass stopper, he poured its contents gently after the crystals. Then, catching at a portable spirit-lamp that had dwarf bellows attached, he finished his performance by fusing a mass of solder upon the orifice of the bore.

Helen Marsham studied him incredulously as he wiped

The door swung wide—with it there came a blast of poisonous gas.

the steel dust from his fingers and commenced to secrete about him the various portions of his apparatus.

"How will all that aid us?" she asked him. The solicitor grunted disdainfully—for Hugo Pontifex, even the beautiful and courageous Mrs. Marsham had her limitations.

"I have arranged a process," he explained, "that is filling the safe with chlorine fumes. They will negate the colouring matter in the ink upon your husband's confession and probably destroy the tissue of the paper itself. If the pure sulphuric acid I used has reached the document it will wipe it out of existence."

His client extended her hands impulsively. "You are a genius, Mr. Pontifex," she said; "pardon me for presuming to dream of criticizing you."

"Don't trouble yourself about that, Mrs. Marsham," advised Hugo Pontifex; "it is the way of the world—to be wise after the event."

As Helen Marsham blushed under the rebuke, he

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screwed the wooden door of the cabinet into position, swept the grains of sparkling metal from the carpet and restored the antique and its surroundings to their pristine neatness.

"Wire me when the funeral is to take place," he instructed; "I must be witness to the unlocking of the safe—your lawyer will doubtless expect to come up here, by himself or with you. Permit me to convoy him as the game is not yet played out."

Mrs. Marsham prepared to lead Mr. Pontifex downstairs. As he left the chamber he glanced back at the buhl cabinet and the rigid shape upon the bed—and smiled. Professional pride was his ruling emotion—that smile spoke volumes.

* * * * *

Hugo Pontifex's next meeting with Mrs. Marsham was in a little boudoir at Namaqua House and occurred a day or two afterwards. The solicitor had been summoned from the library where a score of the guests at the funeral of the South African Railway King speculated upon the purport of the mysterious document, so soon to be read to them, and concerning which countless improbable stories had been rife in Society and the Press.

When Mr. Pontifex entered the boudoir he did not find Mrs. Marsham alone. By her was a handsome man in early middle-life, with shining blue orbs, closely cropped beard and drooping moustaches.

"Mr. Pontifex," said Mrs. Marsham shyly; "this is Dr. Cochrane. Dr. Cochrane, you know Mr. Pontifex to be an inestimable friend of ours."

The doctor and Hugo Pontifex exchanged a cordial hand-clasp. Helen Marsham turned to the remaining person present—a lean and severe personage in a very high collar. Mr. Pontifex recognised him as a prosperous, but kindly West End solicitor.

"Mr. Bendyshe," said Helen Marsham, "let me introduce you to Mr. Pontifex, my own legal adviser. I desire him to witness the opening of the buhl cabinet referred to in my husband's will. Here is the key of the compartment in question."

She gave up the article mentioned and glanced anxiously at Hugo Pontifex, who ignoring her agitation, bowed to his colleague. Mr. Bendyshe returned the salutation.

"Shall we proceed, then, to the late Mr. Marsham's apartment?" he suggested.

Mr. Pontifex coincided with the proposition.

"Permit me to pilot you," he said; "for me the route is a familiar one." And the lawyers, excusing themselves to Mrs. Marsham, went amicably up the stairs of Namaqua House towards the chamber of the buhl cabinet.

As they mounted the flight Mr. Bendyshe took a complicated steel trifle from his pocket.

"My client, Pontifex," he remarked; "was an extraordinary fellow. The cabinet we are going to, or some portion of it, conceals a safe, of which this is the key. I'll bet you a thousand Mrs. M. tried to get a peep at the paper and was disconcerted when she came upon iron walls and a modern lock. Is that why you're here, eh? Ha, ha!"

Mr. Pontifex's lips twitched, but he evaded the jest with practised skill, and they entered the room side by side.

His colleague unfastened the wooden door of the lowest compartment in the buhl cabinet. The silver patch of solder which remained to testify to Hugo Pontifex's proceedings caught the other's eye. He noted it curiously as he slipped the key into the wards.

Mr. Pontifex laid a hand on his coat-sleeve. "Open that with a long arm, Bendyshe," he recommended; "and turn your head aside."

Bendyshe stared at him and shrank back. "Is it an infernal machine?" he gasped. Hugo Pontifex strode up, twisted the projecting steel ring of the key, and pulled at the knob. The door swung wide—with it there came a blast of poisonous gas. Bendyshe sprang to the window and flung it up, Hugo Pontifex was able to see, before imitating his example, that a folded sheet, lying on the bottom of the safe, shivered and vanished as paper ash will do in a current of air.

Joining his colleague at the window, Mr. Pontifex addressed him gravely. "Bendyshe," he said, "you are aware of my standing in the profession. Let me give you some counsel and a piece of information. That paper contained, to Mrs. Marsham's knowledge, the confession of a crime committed by her husband. To save his reputation, she destroyed the document by drilling a hole into the safe and inserting chemicals. You cannot prosecute her with dignity or any hope of success. Go down and tell those sensation-hunters in the library that you could find no paper, such as that described by your client."

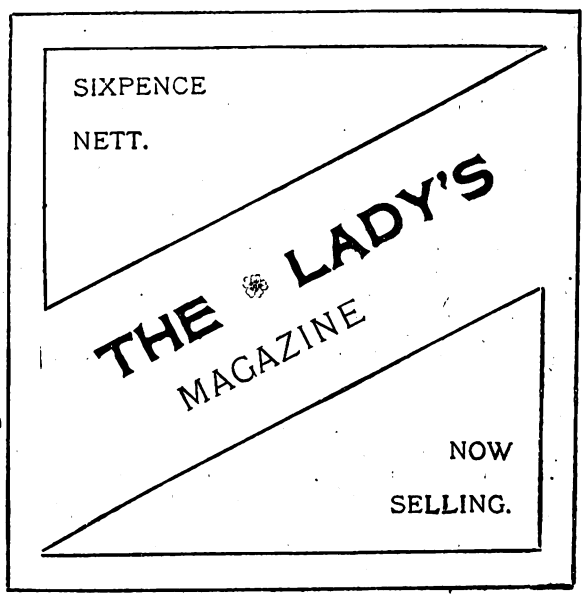
"Good gracious," exclaimed Mr. Bendyshe. "Well, I suppose I had better. Mrs. M. has my sympathy, and she is a plucky creature, I allow. But it was a reckless thing to do, Pontifex—a very reckless thing to do."

He went downstairs, muttering to himself and coughing to get the chlorine fumes off his chest. Hugo Pontifex followed—smiling.

He dined the same evening with Dr. Cochrane, and together they drank the health of the beautiful Helen Marsham.

"Mrs. Cochrane that is to be," said the doctor.

"I congratulate you," answered Hugo Pontifex, "she is no ordinary woman—except that she will ask superfluous questions."



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RAMEE'S MALEDICTION.

"I HAVE not the least doubt that the last of those four rascals is on my track again, my boy," said Colonel Jarvis, somewhat sadly. "It is a war of extermination between us; it has lasted for twelve years, and I was hoping he was dead, seeing that he has not troubled me for five years or more."

"Why did you not tell me of this before, dad," asked Harry Jarvis, looking from the locket in his hand to the face of his father.

"It was not necessary," replied the other man. "But now that this vendetta has been renewed, which must mean that you are also menaced, I am bound to tell you."

"Tell me exactly how the thing stands," said Harry Jarvis in a tone of decision. "I've got a certain amount of pluck——"

"A great deal of it!" interrupted his father with hearty admiration. "It's a great pity you weren't stronger in constitution, for you would have made a splendid soldier."

"I think I have enough constitution to take some of this burden from your shoulder, dad," said the young fellow, affectionately. "Now, tell me."

"It began in the Mutiny," said the colonel, settling himself back in his chair, his eyes assuming a far-away look as he recalled the sad and exciting incidents. "Fate took me away from Cawnpore at the beginning of May, 1857, and when the news came of the rising, I was ill with the fever. You were in England, at school, and your mother perished with many others on that dreadful day in June. You were kept in ignorance of ——"

The old soldier's voice failed, but by a great effort he restrained his emotion and continued.

"As soon as I could get back well enough to be of any use, I was on active service again. I learnt some of the horrible details in due time, thanks chiefly to Kusa. The Malay, grateful to me for having saved him from being murdered in Banca three years previously, had attached himself to me with a fidelity not very common among his people. I had left him with your mother, and he nearly lost his life in doing what he could for the unfortunate Europeans. He was stunned and left for dead.

"He told me how your mother was murdered and that locket taken from her. He said he would recognise the man who did it. A month afterwards he had the opportunity of identifying the assassin, and did so.

"Kusa did valuable service as a spy, and he led me and a company of men to a gang of rebels which included the murderer. A fight took place, many were killed, some escaped and some were taken prisoners, including him. Kusa obtained some details concerning this man, which were curious at the time and became of paramount interest to me afterwards.

"He was a descendant of a Thug. The old sect of stranglers was supposed to have been suppressed and they were kept under Government supervision, but some of them are secret poisoners to this day, and Ramee had resolved to start a fresh sect in conjunction with his four brothers, but instead of using the turban or silk handkerchief, they were to use the knife, and instead of strangling, they were to sever the heads of their victims. From this, I will leave you to guess the manner of your mother's death—certainly it was merciful.

"I found the locket in the wretch's possession, and Kusa told me that the portrait of your mother—that at which you are still looking—had been taken by him as an image of the goddess Kali. The locket itself is of Hindoo workmanship, and the Thug was impressed with the idea that it was a religious relic of the past.

"When I dragged it from him, he screamed and struggled like a veritable demon and uttered all sorts of oaths and threats.

"We made short work of him; we tied him to the mouth of a cannon and then fired it. You know that they think they will never reach paradise if the body is thus destroyed, and this punishment was adopted to deter others.

"When Ramee was tied to the gun and was convinced that there was no hope for him, he became quieter. He turned his head in my direction and gave utterance to these fearful words—I remember them well:

"'My brothers will avenge me. Wherever you go, they will hunt you down until your head and your body are parted, and the image of Kali is in their hands. You and yours, and all others who help you, shall suffer the same fate! My brothers will hear these words.'

"I smiled contemptuously and gave the order that put an end to the murderer's existence. In the exciting events that followed, I forgot the malediction. I was engaged in administrating work after the Mutiny, and it was while I was filling an onerous post in Bengal that I was unpleasantly reminded of the existence of Ramee's brothers.

"It was nearly two years after the execution of Ramee, when I was struck at by a native while making my road homeward one evening. The knife entered my left arm, and before my assailant could recover himself I shot him dead with my revolver. When I was able to get a fair look at the man's face, his resemblance to Ramee proved to be so striking that I could not mistake it.

"This incident made me uneasy. I confess that I was not disturbed on your account, Harry, because I concluded those wretches would not trouble to go to England and attack you while I was still in India and in possession of the locket; besides that, it was just a question that they knew of your existence. And, curiously enough, I understood the malediction to be directed against only those who helped me, whether relatives or friends.

"I told Kusa, and took all necessary precautions. In time my own vigilance relaxed, but the Malay remained just as watchful, and it was he who saved me the second time. The would-be assassin sprang at me from behind, passing one arm under my chin and dragging my head back; but Kusa plunged his *kriss* into his back and saved me. How did Kusa come to be there? That I do no know, except that he made it a duty to watch over me.

"The third attack came about seven years ago, while I was on the banks of the Ganges. I heard a noise behind me and turned just in time to avoid a blow. There were two of them. I clenched my fist and delivered a blow straight from the shoulder, hitting my assailant fairly between the eyes and knocking

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him into the river. That gave me time to draw my revolver ready for the second one, but he fled. I had stunned the first and he was drowned in the river.

"Twice after that, and within a very short space of time, incidents occurred that showed me that the fourth man was still pursuing his object; but we never came to close quarters. Between the second and third attacks, also, there had been suspicious incidents."

"And nothing has taken place between then and now," asked Harry Jarvis, as his father paused, "to arouse your suspicions?"

"Nothing whatever," answered the colonel.

The occurrence which had disturbed the equanimity of Colonel Jarvis was this—Kusa had just reported having seen the face of a Hindoo at one of the lower windows of the house; he had at once rushed into the open in order to capture the intruder, but the Hindoo had entirely disappeared. The colonel, unwilling to believe that his old enemy was again on his track, thought that Kusa might have been mistaken, but this argument was quickly demolished by Kusa's quiet expression of content by the discovery of a shred of clothing on the ivy that mantled the wall.

"I am glad that you have told me all about it," said Harry, "and we must take energetic measures to foil this wretch and bring him to justice. Of course, we can guard you, but I think it will be best for you to go abroad. That will serve two purposes. Your health has been breaking up lately; you need a change; and if this man knows that I am guarding the locket, and at the same time, is ignorant of your whereabouts, he will turn his attention to me. If he does, I think that Kusa and I can deal with him."

Colonel Jarvis would not listen to this proposal at first; it went against the grain of the soldier to retire before an enemy, but the younger man returned to the charge again and again until his dominant will overcame the opposition of a will rendered weaker by failing health.

"All right, Harry!" exclaimed the Colonel at the end of a discussion on the following morning. "I'll give in to you, especially as you will, no doubt, be included in the malediction whether I stay or go. The wretch will take it for granted that you are assisting me to defeat his ends."

"Of course he will! and if you go away I shall feel more free to deal with him, because I shall not be afraid of your coming to harm. If he does not show himself in some way after you are gone, I shall wire to you to be extra careful and shall come after you."

Although Kusa and Harry kept ever on the alert for some sign of the Thug during that day and the next, they failed to detect any indication of his presence in the vicinity. That evening Colonel Jarvis went off without anyone, except his son and the Malay, being aware of it, he took a circuitous route, then went by train to the London terminus, where he took a ticket for the South of France. No one accompanied him; he left the house quite alone.

Then Harry and Kusa awaited developments. The young fellow took every opportunity of informing his friends in the most casual manner that he was carrying the locket on his person; this was not an unnatural thing to do in memory of his mother, and the explanation why he had not done so before was satisfactory enough—he had not known of its existence.

"I have no doubt that this fact will become known all over the place and will get to the ears of our dusky enemy," said Harry to himself. "That's just what I want, for it will turn his attention to me. Where that fellow hides himself I have no idea, but there is no question that these rascally, crafty Thugs do get the information they want. I hope I shall see something of him soon, or I shall get anxious about dad and shall have to wire to him."

Harry apprehended that he ran more danger at night than in the daytime, and he concluded that the Thug was more likely to make an attempt on him while asleep than when awake; so he took great precautions against a surprise visit to his bedroom. He had the chimney and window securely barred, his door locked and something heavy placed against it, and a loaded revolver near his hand.

It was on the fourth day after the colonel's departure, when Kusa came stealthily towards his young master when the latter returned from an afternoon's stroll. There was not much expression in the Malay's face at any time, but on this occasion his countenance and his manner both denoted that he had news to tell.

"What is it, Kusa?" asked Harry. He felt anxious and relieved at the same time, for if the Thug were still in the neighbourhood, the colonel was all right.

"He been here!" was Kusa's answer. "In yoo bedroom."

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry in a surprised tone. "How do you know?"

Instead of replying, the Malay put his hand on the arm of his master and conducted him to the bedroom.

The little case which had held the locket until Harry begun to wear it, was lying on the floor; it had been forced open.

"How did he get in?" asked Harry, looking about for an answer. "Not by the window or the chimney. Then he must have come by the door! This is serious, Kusa! He has managed to get through the house in some way without being seen; perhaps he is in hiding now!"

"I tink not!" replied Kusa, with a smile that convinced Harry. "I look about and have de dog. But here someting more ser'ous!"

He went to the pillow and, placing a hand on each end of it, pressed upon it, gradually bringing his two hands nearer to the centre. As the pillow was depressed near the middle, a long thin, and cruelly sharp spike showed itself through the cover.

Harry shuddered.

"Dat meant for yoo!" said the Malay laconically.

"I suppose he thought that would run into my temple and at least so incapacitate me that I should fall an easy victim. Thank you, Kusa! We must be careful."

It was scarcely any wonder that Harry Jarvis went about with a certain feeling of fear; although he attempted to keep his nerves braced up, he started at any unusual sound and his eyes were constantly on the move, as is usual with a man who is expecting danger at every point and watching for it. He took the precaution to have his dog with him wherever he went.

"Any news, anything fresh?" was his inquiry every time he met Kusa after an absence of an hour or so. But Kusa shook his head.

Every night the Malay examined his master's room before the latter retired and bolted his door; Kusa's sharp eyes were more likely to detect any suspicious sign or circumstance than were those of his master. But another week passed without incident.

Harry Jarvis was invited to a dinner party at the house of a local gentleman who had an idea that his daughter would make a good wife for the colonel's

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son; he accepted the invitation without guessing its object, and it was getting towards midnight before he returned.

He had his dog with him. He was not exactly fearful of an attack on his road home, but an uneasy feeling had pervaded his whole being during the evening—a feeling that something was amiss, that something was about to happen. His pre-occupation had been so marked as to call forth some sly remarks from his host, but Harry quite failed to detect the point of these little jests.

"Kusa will be sitting up for me," he murmured several times during his short walk. "Really, it will be a relief to see him, just to know what has or has not happened."

Harry let himself in and went straight to the room where he expected to find the Malay, who had a small bedroom and an outer room which served various purposes. There was a light burning in this outer room, as Harry had expected.

He opened the door and entered, softly calling "Kusa!" as he did so.

The dog ran across the floor straight to the bedroom.

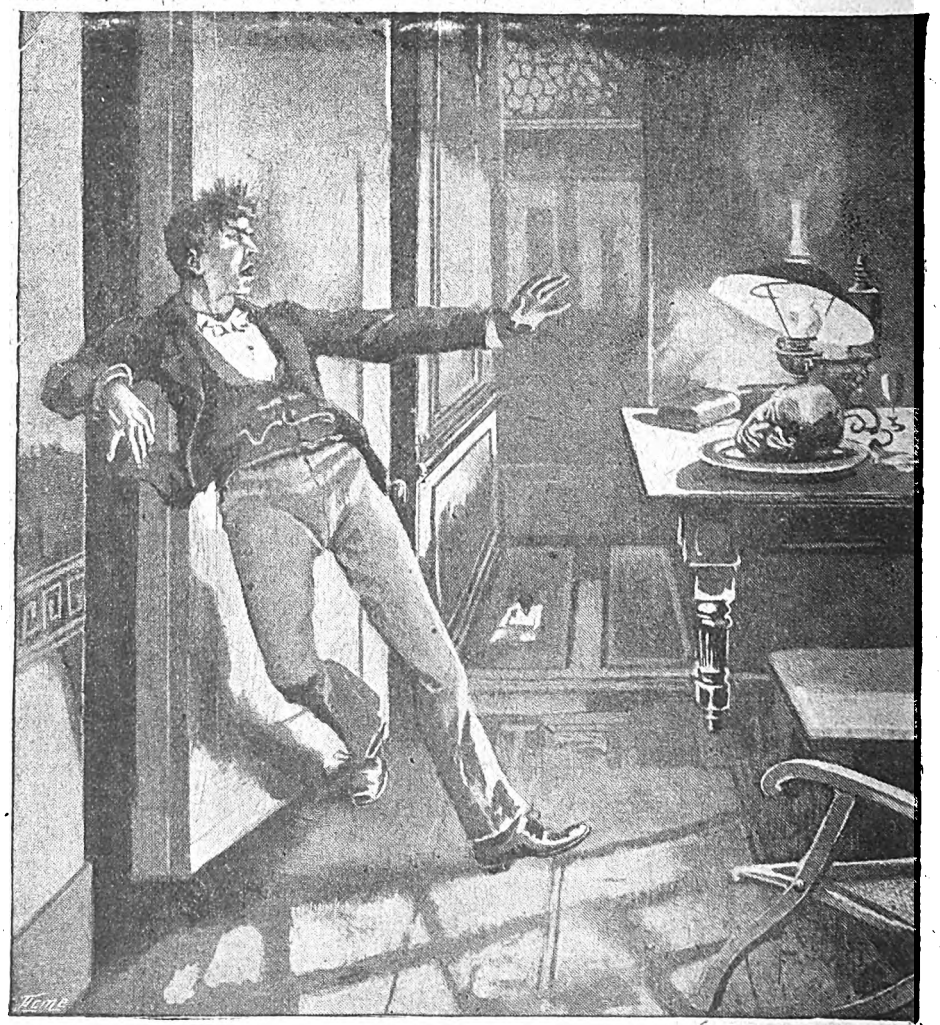
There was no reply to Harry's call and the room was empty; he looked about inquiringly, and then his eyes fell on an object on the table.

He took a step nearer in order to look at it more closely, but recoiled immediately with a cry of horror.

The ghastly object was the severed head of the Malay, lying on a dish, the shade of the lamp having been turned up so that the full light should fall on it.

Harry stood transfixed with horror and terror, scarcely able to believe the evidence of his eyes. It was too terrible to believe, too awful to think that the faithful Malay had fallen a victim to the unrelenting hatred of the Thug. But it was so, and as Harry realized it, he became aware that the dog was whining in the bedroom. He turned to make his way there, but it seemed as if he could not take his eyes from the dreadful object; fear seized upon him, he felt that the Thug must be near at hand—heavens! Perhaps behind him, standing in the open door, ready to spring on him! By a mighty effort he nerved himself to move; he cast a swift glance around the room and then walked boldly to the other apartment. On the floor lay the headless body of his faithful servant, and the dog was whining by its side. The murder created a great stir. Harry explained the circumstances, and a hunt took place for the Thug, but he had disappeared like a thin wreath of smoke. But Harry knew the nature of the man who was so unswervingly carrying out his mission, and never relaxed his vigilance.

For a whole month there was no further indication of the mysterious Hindoo. Harry had his dog with him in his bedroom and seldom went out of the house, even if only for a walk in the grounds which surrounded the residence, without a human companion as well as his dog. But the mental strain was telling on him to such an extent that he knew it would undermine his constitution if it lasted much longer. At last, in sheer desperation, he resolved to bring matters to a crisis.



Harry stood transfixed with horror and terror.

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"I'll end it one way or the other!" he cried. "I feel that he is here, constantly watching me; I know it is so, although I cannot see him. It is his life or mine, and I will end this struggle!"

He pondered on a plan that would bring him face to face with his would-be murderer. On the whole, it seemed most probable that the bedroom might be chosen as the best point of attack if the Thug could be induced to take advantage of an opening—and he was probably on the look out for such an opportunity—he would enter the bedroom when he thought Harry was asleep. The plan, therefore, would be to give him that opening.

It was rather stange that, in spite of Harry's having made known that he was carrying the looket, the Hindoo should have entered the bedroom and broken open the case. It seemed as if he had believed Harry to be trying to throw him off the scent. Reasoning in the same way, the Thug might think he was being enticed into a trap if Harry made it known publicly that he was not taking so much precaution. It must be done as innocently as possible.

The dog was sent to a veterinary surgeon to be attended to for some complaint; the learned man undertook the care of the dog, but for the life of him he could not discover what was wrong with the animal.

Then the window required seeing to, it was not secure enough! and at the same time, the lock had to be taken off the door.

People began to think that Harry Jarvis was going wrong in his head; the workmen engaged to look to these things, could find no defects.

That night when Mr. Harry Jarvis retired to bed, the servants comprehended, despite the makeshifts, that the room was not so secure from intruders as it had been; they believed that he thought otherwise, for they did not know that this was part of his plan.

And here it may be mentioned that the only two servants in the house were men—old soldiers—as no woman would remain after the murder of Kusa.

The figure which lay in the bed that night was not the figure of Harry Jarvis; it was a dummy, made up for the occasion, while Harry secreted himself behind a curtain covering a recess in the corner.

It was a lonely vigil, full of unspeakable terrors, but the morning dawned without the quiet of the house having been disturbed. The young fellow snatched a little sleep during the day, and prepared to watch again through the night.

"He would hardly come the first night," muttered the watcher behind the curtain, "but I shall be disappointed if we do not settle accounts before to-morrow morning. This reminds me of my father's stories of those occasions when a soldier has to put his back against the wall and fight to the death."

Slowly the time passed. Harry revolved in his mind all the events of the past few weeks. What was the exact meaning of that spike in the pillow? It may have been meant to kill him outright, for it was poison, or only to render him an easy victory. But if the man followed the doctrine of his creed, he must be there to treat him (Harry) as he had treated the unfortunate Malay; and it is an undoubted fact that these strange sects are very particular in the followings of their doctrines.

How would the Thug get into the room? By the door or by the window? Harry's nerves were at their utmost tension, his sense of hearing was strained to the fullest extent, his eyes seemed ready to burst as he peered through the little opening in his endeavours to watch for the entrance of his foe. He could scarcely keep his limbs still; at one moment he fancied he heard the door being opened stealthily, and he gripped his revolver more tightly, then he started as he thought he heard a sound above his head, as though the Thug were about to drop upon him from the ceiling. Finally, his nerves were over-strained and he could perceive nothing distinctly.

Thus it came about that the curtain was suddenly pulled aside and a figure sprang upon him, full in front, without his being aware that anyone was in the room. His revolver was knocked from his hand, thin fingers fastened themselves on his throat and he was borne backwards against the wall.

He was powerless, paralysed by the sudden onslaught. The final struggle had begun in real earnest and he was worsted. He heard a voice—a fiendish voice—say something in broken English.

"Your father kill all my brothers. I kill you, like your servant. Then I kill the old sahib."

The mention of his father, the prospects of the old man also falling under the assassin's knife, acted like magic upon Harry, so small are circumstances that changed the course of our lives! His strength seemed to come back to him, he threw up his arms and clutched his adversary by the throat and they rolled over together.

The struggle was of short duration; the Hindoo was strong, and in a few seconds he had Harry underneath and was raising his knife to plunge it into his breast. Jarvis could feel, rather than see, the action and gave himself up for lost. The knife came down and struck him, but it appeared to meet with some resistance, although he felt a sharp pain.

Just at that moment he became conscious that his fingers of his right hand were touching the butt of his revolver; it was all over with him, but he might have just enough strength left to have a dying shot at his murderer, who was now relaxing his grasp under the impression that he had killed his victim.

Harry was lying quite still; he knew that he must act quickly. The hand of the Thug was now against his chin, pushing it back; like a flash he grasped the revolver, raised it and fired.

Without a sound the Hindoo rolled over and remained motionless.

* * * * *

Of course, the coroner's jury brought in a verdict of "Justifiable Homicide."

The Hindoo had been shot through the brain.

Everybody said that it was a lucky thing for Harry Jarvis that he was carrying the locket inside his waistcoat, for he would otherwise have been killed instead of receiving a mere scratch.

The locket was spoilt; as it glanced off, the knife had torn the fastening, and the blood from the wound had saturated the portrait within.

The locket was never renovated, but was placed in a box and locked up in a drawer in the iron safe. Colonel Jarvis, who had been confined to his bed for some weeks and had been kept in ignorance of what had happened, was surprised and gladdened by a visit from his son, and the news that the last of his enemies had been disposed of had the effect of hastening his recovery.

There is a tombstone in the village churchyard to mark the resting place of the faithful Kusa, and a portrait of him, painted from memory by Harry's wife hangs in the study.

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Little Beryl's Last Appearance.

A LITTLE group of stage-hands, lounging about the back-entrance of the Theatre Royal at the flourishing Midland town of Smokedale were somewhat exercised in their minds one chilly April morning, when they saw a small child, cosily wrapped in furs, emerge into the street.

She regarded the men gravely with large clear grey eyes, which shone from under a mass of golden brown hair, and seemed about to speak, when a lady—evidently a lady, in spite of the somewhat faded attire, which contrasted oddly with the smart appearance of the little girl—bade her "come along."

"Not wivout the Baroness, muvver; can't go wivout the dear Baroness," objected the child in a grave tone, and the lady, with a sigh and a smile, waited a moment for the desired companion.

That venerable peeress soon made her appearance. A fat cigar reeked in the corner of her mouth, and a brown bowler hat was cocked jauntily on the side of her head.

She was, in fact, none other than Mr. Frank Bates, comedian, who sustained the part of the Baroness in the new light opera "The Chimes of Charleroi," in a manner replete with genuine humour untainted with the least suspicion of vulgarity. At least, so the papers said, and their opinion was cordially supported by Mr. Bates in his own person.

"Morning, Mrs. Tracy; morning Beryl, dear," cried the comedian, removing the jaunty brown bowler with a flourish, and stuffing a big bundle of unopened letters, just received from the stage-doorkeeper, into his overcoat pocket. "Ready to go before the beak—eh? I expect," he continued gravely, "they'll only give you six months in consideration of your youth."

Beryl regarded him with grave disdain.

"Have you got an orange?" she demanded, coming straight to the point in the fearless fashion of childhood.

"Shouldn't wonder if I had," rejoined Bates cheerily; and the golden fruit was soon forthcoming from the depths of the overcoat pocket. Then, with Mrs. Tracy on one hand, and the comedian on the other, Beryl set forth on the way to the Smokedale Police Court.

Mr. Charlton's opera company was a touring one, playing perhaps a fortnight in each town, or three weeks if houses ruled large, and no date was booked at another theatre.

The sage provisions of the law regarding the employment of children on the stage, provided that a fresh license to play had to be obtained for Beryl Tracy (or "Little Beryl, the Most Marvellous Child Actress of the Age,") in every town visited. By this time Beryl was used to the formality, and, backed by her mother and the faithful Baroness, regarded Bench, clerk, and policeman with no sort of awe.

The thin, pale, aristocratic features of Mrs. Tracy, the bright, pretty child, and the cheery twinkle in the eye of Mr. Bates, produced their usual impression in the breast of the burly constable keeping the door of the Smokedale Police Court, and he bent forward with an expression of interest on his broad, red face.

"What business, ma'am?" he inquired in a hoarse whisper.

Mrs. Tracy explained.

"There's 'ardly anyone at the solicitor's table," the policeman said, peering into the court. "I should set there if I was you, ma'am. It'll be more comfortable for you. There ain't much business this morning, so you won't 'ave to wait long."

Accordingly, at the solicitor's table, viewed with languid curiosity by the clerk and one sleepy lawyer's boy, mother and child took their seats. Bates, with the expansiveness of his tribe, lingered to chat with the friendly constable.

"You're unlucky this morning," remarked the guardian of the peace.

"How so?"

"Adisham's on the Bench. Not that there'll be any trouble, 'ceptin' he might pass a few hasty remarks," the constable hastened to add.

"Who's Adisham?" inquired Bates.

"'Ates theatres—and actresses. My word!—like poison!" the constable explained.

"Nice cup o' tea he must be."

"Used to be a rare one for theatres about ten years ago. Was at the Royalty or the Comedy nearly every night," went on the constable, folding his arms, setting his back against the door, and evidently enjoying a chat with the comedian. "'Ates 'em now."

"You don't say so! What for?"

"Dunno. Some say that he was mashed on a actress wot jilted him, but there's no knowing. Any'ow, 'e 'asn't been seen in a theatre in this town for ten years or more—that's a certain fact."

"And what might this sportsman be when he's at home?" inquired Bates.

"Brassfounder. Pots o' money."

"Ha!" said the comedian, brightly, "just the sort of Johnnie to take tickets for my benefit."

And with a pleasant nod to the policeman, he passed into the court.

Fog was filling the room; the frowsy idlers on the back benches could hardly be distinguished. There were three magistrates on the Bench: a rosy-faced, white-haired old man with an air of mild good nature, a square-faced, determined-looking, middle-aged one, with bushy black whiskers and thin lips, and a third, apparently younger than the other two, so far as his face could be distinguished. With elbow on the desk in front of him, however, he contrived to shield his face with a white, well-kept hand, on which was a massive signet-ring which glittered under the electric light. The comedian slid into a seat beside Beryl, who surreptitiously patted her Baroness' hand beneath the table.

"Muvver's looked so ill since we've been here," she whispered. "I was afraid she would faint."

Bates shot a glance at Mrs. Tracy. Her eyes were cast down, her thin, high-bred face absolutely bloodless, her lips tightly compressed. She felt the comedian's eyes upon her, however, and flashed him a sad smile.

In the dock a broken-nosed person in a red muffler was being asked to explain his possession of a clock and

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a pair of vases, supposed to have been stolen. Hoarsely he protested that the articles had been given to him in a public-house by a man he did not know. However, this simple and straightforward explanation was but coldly received, and his remand for inquiries concluded the police-business of the day.

Mrs. Tracy's application was taken next, Bates, as stage-manager, representing Mr. Charlton.

"Stand up, my dear," said the rosy-faced old man in his mild way to Beryl. The other two magistrates seemed to have lost all interest in the proceedings. He with the black whiskers leant back with folded arms and stared at the ceiling. The youngest magistrate did not move. A series of the usual questions was put to the child Beryl.

"Did she like her work—hey? What time did she go to bed—hey? Did she do lessons—hey? Who taught her—hey?" and to all these queries Miss Beryl with great self-possession returned appropriate answers. The application was soon granted, and the clerk signed to Mrs. Tracy's party to go.

"One moment," said the youngest magistrate. He leant over his desk, his arms folded, and fixed his eyes on Beryl. It was a strong, stern face that the electric-light stare on, with lines of suffering about the eyes and close-shaven lips.

"Where is your father?" said Adisham, abruptly.

There was momentary silence, only broken by a quick in-drawing of the breath from Mrs. Tracy. The rosy-faced old man looked with mild curiosity at his colleague.

"I have no father," said Beryl in her clear voice.

A murmur ran through the crowded court. Adisham sank back with a pallid face, the lines deepening round his firm mouth. Mrs. Tracy gave a little moan and seemed about to faint. In a few moments the faithful Bates had her out of court into the fresh, cold air.

"Cruel, cruel!" she murmured almost wildly as they passed through the doors.

The same night the piece vivaciously ran its course before a delighted audience. The Baroness had just responded to the third encore for her great song, "Oh! if Her Mother Only Knew," when a figure, totally unfamiliar to the *habitués* of the Royal, slipped into a stall in the back row. It was George Adisham. His intimates would have been considerably astonished to see this hater of the stage and its professors in this situation, but no words could describe their state of mind had they descried him after the performance loitering up and down outside the stage door like a stage-struck junior clerk from his own counting-house.

His cigar was about half-smoked, when Mrs. Tracy, Beryl, and the Baroness came out.

"Dora!" he said in his deep voice. His face was ghastly in the dim light of the stage-door lamp.

"George, is it you?"

Beryl seized the comedian's hand. Her mother turned to her.

"Go on in front, dear, with Mr. Bates. I—I have to talk to Mr. Adisham."

Half-an-hour later, Beryl safely in bed, Adisham and Mrs. Tracy held low-toned converse in the sitting-room of the lodgings.

"So—he is dead," said the man.

"Yes, I have been a widow for eighteen months," replied Dora quietly.

"*De mortuis*—" said Adisham with a bitter smile.

"Hush!" interrupted the woman quickly, a faint flush staining her pale face. "He was good to me—he——"

She lied bravely, as women will; but Adisham's keen eyes made her defence of her dead blackguard of no avail. She dropped her own before his searching gaze.

"Let us forgive the dead. They cannot defend themselves," she said gently.

"I will forgive him," said Adisham, almost fiercely. His eyes glittered. "He stole you from me—Rupert Tracy, the handsome actor all the girls were in love with! He stole you from me—I tell you, for you were mine once—with his practised arts. But he has made amends."

He stopped, panting.

Mrs. Tracy sighed with a weary air.

"Have you only come here to abuse my dead husband?" she asked icily.

He sprang to her and caught her two cold hands in his.

"Forgive me, Dora," he murmured. "Imagine what my life has been this ten years. Is it very strange that I should feel hard to him?"

His burning eyes were fixed upon her. She did not withdraw her hands, but looked him squarely in the eyes. What she said then no one knows; but there were no more words. Her head drooped, she bent nearer to him, and nearer still, till his arms slid round her and held her close to his faithful heart.

* * * * *

Mr. Charles Charlton declared that his tenderest feelings had been outraged when Mr. Adisham insisted on Beryl breaking her contract there and then; but the forfeit he demanded was cheerfully paid, and the night that Mrs. Tracy promised to marry her old sweetheart saw "Little Beryl's" last appearance.

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A Maid of Muscovy

Down Wapping way there is a certain old public-house by the riverside, known by the sign of the "Red Admiral." It is approached from the land side by a narrow, evil-smelling alley-way, leading out of the main street of the district. The rear of the premises are weather boarded (once black, but now grey with age), and overhang the water in crazy fashion, so that the occupants of this part of the house might almost fancy themselves afloat in more senses than one.

It was a house of no great reputation, for the matter of that, of very small credit indeed, nowadays being used principally by a shady, shifty class of customer. Formerly it had been a popular house of call for watermen, but watermen are in this year of grace a decayed fraternity, and so "The Red Admiral" has decayed, too, becoming decrepit, disreputable; at once an eyesore and a nuisance.

It was at this time kept by one Eli Shackleton, an old man with one son, a precious young rascal, who robbed his father on every conceivable opportunity, and only waited his chance to make as sufficient a haul as should enable him to show the place a clean pair of heels.

Eli was himself a bit of a rough character, but age and a not too limited devotion to his own wares had sensibly affected his bodily and mental powers.

Young Sam, therefore, had a fairly free run, and took good care to avail himself of every advantage the fact gave him.

There was one peculiarity connected with the old "public," in that from time to time it was visited by certain Russian immigrants, who by the production of credentials, generally in the shape of dirty, illegibly-inscribed scraps of paper, established friendly relations with the proprietor.

In his early days Eli had been a mariner, in the Baltic trade; hence his connection with Russian interests; but, of the actual nature of the bond between himself and his mysterious visitors nothing can be said, because nothing was greatly known.

His son never rested in his endeavours to penetrate the mystery, but in this, his father was more than a match for him, and the thing so far as he was concerned remained a mystery still.

On a murky, dismally-cold November evening in the year —88 the *Nijni Novgórod*, from St. Petersburg, steamed slowly up the river to her berth in the Pool, nearly opposite to "The Red Admiral."

There were always two or three wherries, ancient, ill-found and filthily dirty, at the foot of the slimy, rotten wooden steps that formed the river end of the alley-way. Their owners were more often than not in the bar of the public-house, but on this particular occasion one of them, an old man, sat hunched up in his boat, blinkily looking for the custom that seemed so long in coming.

A hail from the deck of the Russian steamer as she swung to her moorings, advised him of the prospect of a job, and, pushing out into the stream, he sculled, as fast as his withered, sapless old arms would allow him, in the direction of the ship.

At the gangway stood a young girl, of fifteen or thereabouts. Dark, expressive eyes, a sallow complexion, and hair hanging in two long plaits over her shoulders, proclaimed her Slav, while her every now and then vivacious chatter to a tall, grey-bearded, long-cloaked man immediately behind her, testified to her brightness of disposition.

The transfer of the couple, with their modest impedimenta, to the wherry, did not take long, and within a few minutes father and daughter, as they undoubtedly were, were safely bestowed in the inner parlour of "The Red Admiral."

Young Sam was not at home when they arrived, but on his return set himself to ferreting out the why and the wherefore of things. That he was unsuccessful is no reason why the reader should not be enlightened.

Georges Petrovitch had been implicated in the murder of the Czar Alexander II., and had been in hiding during the years that had elapsed since that event, despite every effort on the part of the Russian authorities to discover his whereabouts.

An opportunity having arisen, enabling him, and his daughter Olga, to join the *Nijni Novgorod* at a point off the Crimean Coast remote from the ken of the government spies, he seized it, though effecting his purpose only in the teeth of the greatest difficulty and danger.

Olga was quite ignorant of her father's share in the events of that fatal year, looking up to him with the utmost love and reverence. At times she had noticed his gloominess of manner, and wondered at it, but with Petrovitch such fits were rare and did not last long, so that she soon ceased to be exercised in mind, and laughed and chattered as aforetime.

Georges Petrovitch was possessed with no feeling of remorse or compunction with regard to his participation in the crime. He honestly believed the deed to have been necessary, his creed being the sacrifice of the few for the good of the many.

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Old Eli and himself were closeted for an hour or two; their deliberations, whatever their import, being strictly confined to themselves. Possibly it concerned the mere future settlement in London of Petrovitch and his daughter, the landlord of "The Red Admiral" having an intimate knowledge of all the likely places in the foreign colony of the metropolis.

Anyway, the pair remained as guests for more than a week, and it was only an incident that occurred on the night of the tenth day which determined the visit, and resulted in the somewhat premature departure of Olga and her father.

Opening out of the back of the bar was a room used more for the storing of lumber and material needed in the business, than for domestic comfort. Here was a small safe let into the wall, the key of which old Eli invariably carried about with him. There was another entrance into this room by a door from a passage, running the depth of the house. This door had two small squares of glass in its upper panels, enabling anyone outside to see within the apartment.

On the night in question, Olga, who slept in the room immediately over this one, was restless and wakeful. Young Sam had gone out early in the evening, and so far as she knew had not returned.

It was some time past midnight when she heard a noise as of someone moving about in the room below. She had not undressed, and being by nature a courageous little soul, she quietly opened the door and crept noiselessly down the stairway.

Arrived at the foot she paused at the door leading into the bar-parlour, through the glass in which came a soft light, and, raising herself on tip-toe, peeped into the room.

What she saw frightened her for the moment. A man with his back to her was investig ting the contents of the safe, the door of which had evidently been forced open. The thief half-turned his head, and Olga recognised him.

Young Sam, for it was he, had just removed a large cashbox, and was in the act of placing it on the table for examination, when Olga, rapidly opening the door, made two steps forward and placed her hand upon it.

Astounded at such an apparition, with an oath Sam Shackleton turned upon the girl.

"Leave go! what's it to do with you? If you don't leave go, I'll smash you!"

"You've no right to it, it is your father's," she said quietly in broken English. "I will take care of it till the morning, and will then give it to him."

She made to do as she had said, but the young ruffian was too quick for her.

Snatching the box from under her hand, he thrust her away savagely, so that she fell to the ground; as she did so, her forehead struck violently the edge of the table.

Young Sam, pausing an instant only to pick up the box, which had fallen in the scuffle, and to cast a half-malignant, half-terrified glance at Olga, who lay white and still, on her brow a wound, perilously near the right temple, turned and fled.

Leaping the counter, and shooting the bolts of the front door, he disappeared into the night, leaving the door open behind him.

* * * * *

It is ten years since Georges Petrovitch and Olga landed on British soil. Their life has been uneventful during all this while. There is but one thing which troubles the girl, now a fine, handsome young woman of stately presence, and with the air of a princess. Petrovitch, regularly on the Thursday evening in each week, leaves the little home in Dean Street, Soho, over the restaurateur's, to be absent until the small hours of the next day.

Where he goes, and upon what errand, she is profoundly ignorant, but there is just a suspicion in her

At the gangway stood a young girl of fifteen or thereabouts.

mind of the truth—that politics, Russian politics, are at the bottom of it. Still, she is far from being certain, and the uncertainty makes her unhappy and wretchedly anxious.

It is on one of these periodical occasions that she is told a gentleman desires to see her. Petrovitch has been gone but a few minutes, and she is therefore alone. Knowing no one of the opposite sex who would be likely to call upon her in this way, and at this house, she naturally hesitates before admitting the visitor. He, however, has followed hard on the footsteps of the little Swiss serving maiden.

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"Pardon me," he says, hat in hand, and standing in the doorway, "but I wish to claim the privilege of an old acquaintance."

Olga looks at him in bewildered astonishment. A burly man of middle height, with sandy hair, and beard and whiskers close-trimmed, his personality recalls no memories to her. Small eyes, and an odd trick of looking furtively from under the lids, are not a pleasant characteristic, and it is this which eventually sets her thinking.

Meanwhile the individual has, unasked, taken a chair.

"Am I so altered, then?" he continued, a peculiar smile accentuating the query.

"I cannot say, because I have no recollection of you."

"No?—that is hardly complimentary. I think at one time, some years ago, you and your father were guests of ours at 'The Red Admiral.'"

Olga started up in intense agitation, while the man thought how beautiful her indignation (and she was indignant) made her.

"You!" she said. "You!—How dare you!—Go away! It is only some wickedness that has brought you here. We do not want to know you! Go away! There are those here who will protect me."

"Hoity-toity! this is a fine welcome to an old friend."

"Friend! *that* you never were—to me!—Do you see this?—this, Sam Shackleton?" and she put back the hair from her forehead, upon which, just above the right temple, a long dark red scar plainly showed itself. "Do you see this? and do you think that the man who struck the blow can ever be friend of mine? Go away!—and never dare to repeat this insult."

Her contemptuous loathing stung him at last; and the coarse brutal nature of the man broke through the very thin veneer of conventional respectability.

"Very well, my lady, very well," he said, his voice thick and his face crimson with passion, "I'd have been a good friend to you."

"You!" she interrupted him scornfully.

"Yes, I would. You don't know, perhaps, that I've come back from Kimberley a more than rich man? I could hang diamonds on every square inch of you. When I saw you the other day in the street, I said to myself that I'd give you a chance to wear 'em. It's your own fault if you won't. But look out, both of you; especially that precious father of yours. Maybe I know more than you think. Anyway, look out. Sam Shackleton is no fool, and doesn't go about with his eyes shut."

Putting on his hat, he opened the door, looked meaningly at her as she still stood on the other side of the table, with her one hand resting upon it, and went out.

For some reason or other Olga did not tell her father of Sam Shackleton's visit. Much to her relief it was not repeated.

When, however, on the following Thursday evening Petrovitch made to depart upon his usual weekly expedition, she seemed more than ordinarily anxious, and, although her father pooh-pooh'd her fears for him, and would not be persuaded to forego his engagement, she saw him leave, with a heavy heart.

Petrovitch was a little lame, and walked but slowly. Swiftly, as the door closed behind him, Olga put on on her hat and jacket, and flew down the stairs into the street. She saw him but a few yards ahead of her, and, keeping well out of sight followed hard after him.

Through a small lane into Frith Street, and so, by way of Old Compton Street, into a narrow, paved thoroughfare for foot passengers only.

Here, when about halfway through, the old man stopped at the private door of a small tobacconist's shop.

Giving five distinct knocks, the door was opened, and, he disappearing inside, was quickly closed again.

Rapidly making a mental note of the house, and the name, a Russian one, over the shop, Olga walked away as if her life depended upon it, in the direction of Oxford Street. From here into Regent Street, and thence, having crossed it, up one of the small streets which run off to the right near the Queen's Hall.

At a certain house, a large brass door-plate announced that "Henry James Day, Solicitor" had his office and dwelling there.

Olga knocked and rang, and, there being no immediate response, knocked and rang again.

"Mr. Day! is he in?" she panted out to the girl who answered her summons,

"Yes, Miss" (she knew Olga well). "Will you come in?"

But other ears had heard the inquiry. Out of the room on the left of the hall, came a tall young fellow of about thirty-one or two.

"Olga! and at this time of night! What's the matter, dear? Why, your hands are like ice! Jennie! tell your mother to get some hot coffee for Miss Olga directly."

"Oh! Harry! never mind me now. I want you to come and help me! Father is in danger, I am sure of it!"

And then she told him all about Sam Shackleton's visit, and his threats of what he could and would do.

Henry Day was rather inclined to make light of the matter, being far more disposed to anger with regard to the insult offered to his sweetheart.

He had won her, as it were, at the sword's point when, three years before, he had championed her cause late one night as on her way home, she had been grossly molested by some well-dressed scoundrel.

"My dear girl! I'll come, of course, if it will ease your mind; but as it's only surmise on your part I expect that you'll find you're worrying your poor little head for nothing."

"There's a dear!" she pleaded, "come! Come now, will you?"

"Very well! we'll start at once."

* * * * *

On the afternoon of the day of Sam Shackleton's unwelcome visit to Olga two men met about three o'clock outside "The Horseshoe," in Tottenham Court Road.

"And you know! You have seen him—Georges Petrovitch—go into and come out of this house?"

"Yes, yes! I tell you! Why, last night I waited outside from just before midnight till four this morning, and—then I saw him!"

The first speaker was evidently a foreigner, quiet, restrained, and not at all familiar in his manner towards his companion.

There was an air of officialism about him—the keen alertness of eye and feature, the "strong" look proclaimed it. The other was Sam Shackleton.

"Ah!" said the Russian, as his next words showed him to be, "when you called at Chesham Place early last evening, you told the Count, I believe, that you were then going on to this club. Now, I have further instructions for you from His Excellency the Ambassador."

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"Instructions! me!"

"Yes! you. You will go on Thursday evening next with a form of introduction (to be furnished you by us), to this club. You will be admitted a member; and—you will tell us the rest."

"I'll see you hanged first! Go yourself! Do your own dirty work!"

"Come! come now! will you?"

"No, I am known to these men. I cannot. You will go."

Sam Shackleton was a coward, as we know, and he was, in spite of himself, powerless to kick against the pricks.

"Well," he said, sullenly, "suppose I agree to go, what then; where do you come in?"

"That is my—is our business," quietly and imperturbably rejoined the other.

"Shall you be within hail?" asked Sam.

"Perhaps."

"No, but will you—will you?"

"But why do you ask, my good Monsieur Shackleton?—you are not afraid!—you are—what you call—hero! eh?"

"Get out!" replied Sam, savagely.

"But yes! tell me; what is your motive? Is it that you hate this Georges Petrovitch?"

"Yes!—yes!—I hate him! and—and—her. I hate them both!"

"Ah! I thought so!—well; that is your affair—Our business is to trap the murderer of the Czar—lure him, if possible to the river, and then——" (The agent shrugged his shoulders, and gave a quiet smile.) "Then George Petrovitch will start on his journey to join his comrades in the 'Happy Valley'—*Voilà.*"

"You shall—you shall," hissed Sam.

"Good," replied the police spy, "you will hear of or see me on Thursday night some time. Meanwhile, *au revoir, mon ami.*"

He turned abruptly, and crossing Oxford Street, was speedily lost in the purlieus of Soho.

Sam stood a moment looking uneasily after him, and then followed slowly in the same direction.

* * * * *

In less than half-an-hour, Harry Day and Olga were standing in front of the tobacconist's shop.

On the way, Olga had instructed him how to proceed. Accordingly, he gave the orthodox five raps, and waited results.

Hardly had the sound of the last rap died away when the door was flung violently open, and a man—coatless, hatless, his shirt torn, and spotted here and there with blood, his face white and terrified-looking—was thrust out, as by invisible hands, right into the young lawyer's arms, and the door banged to again.

"Hullo! what's the matter, man?" said Harry, supporting his burden as best he could.

"I'll hang 'em!—hang 'em all! They're all devils!—devils!" shrieked the wretched object. "They've nearly murdered me! Fetch the police; I know what'll hang 'em!"

"Quietly—quietly," replied Harry.

At this moment an inspector of police and two constables came up and proceeded to investigate.

"Your name, sir," said the inspector to the man.

"Samuel Shackleton, stopping at the 'Cecil.'"

"What do you complain of?"

"There is an illegal club in there! They're Nihilists—murderers! They've nearly done for me!"

"What were you doing there?"

"That's my business."

"Then you must manage it yourself. We've had no complaint of the house; and you'd better get into a cab and go back to the Cecil."

A man in sober grey had been quietly listening to this short colloquy, and now came forward, placing his hand on Shackleton's shoulder.

"Samuel Shackleton," he said; "I hold a warrant, issued by the Chief Magistrate of Cape Town, Cape Colony, for your arrest, on a charge of stealing from one Otto Greenbaum, of that place, diamonds to the value of £70,000."

* * * * *

With Sam Shackleton's arrest and subsequent consignment to penal servitude for twenty years, the troubles of Olga and her father faded away into the quiet happiness that they had known before Sam Shackleton's re-appearance.

Harry and his sweetheart are married now, and the name that he loves best to call her is—just that—his sweetheart; whereat she only puts her finger upon his lips, and says:

"Foolish fellow!"

RALPH ENDERBY.

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THE FATE OF MICHAEL STANDRIDGE

By HEADON HILL.

Author of "The Peril of the Prince," "Seaward for the Foe," "Guilty Gold," etc.

SUMMARY.

THE steamship *Trojan* is homeward bound from the Cape. On board is Michael Standridge, who is returning to England from the Kimberley diamond fields, in possession of the "Kimberley Elephant," the largest diamond found in the colony. On the ship is his half-brother, Simon Hoathley. On the way up the English Channel the latter steals into the miner's cabin with the intention of murdering him and obtaining possession of the diamond. The miner, however, is on the alert, and presents a pistol at the intruder's head.

Michael sells his diamond for £20,000 to Messrs. Strauss and Lightfoot, whose clerk, Swinley Tasker, he discovers in an attempt to rob him of £35. Michael reads Tasker a lecture, kicks him, and departs—having made an enemy of this rascal. Reading is where Michael expects to find news of his daughter, and he purchases Kennett's Cross, a dilapidated farmhouse in the neighbourhood, this house meeting his requirements by being very secluded, and on a clay soil suitable for brickmaking.

He spends his time in making bricks, and as each batch is made he draws out from the bank a thousand pounds in gold, until at length his balance is quite low. One day Michael is thrown out of his pony-trap, and enters a house for assistance. Here he finds Cuthbert Blakesley, the cashier at the bank, and two ladies, and recognises in the younger one, to whom Cuthbert is engaged to be married, a strong resemblance to his wife.

Mrs. Bonfield is able to prove that Marion is Michael's daughter, and he promises to acquaint her shortly with the secret of Kennett's Cross. A few weeks later Marion and Cuthbert are sitting in the garden, waiting for her father, when a constable enters and arrests Cuthbert on the charge of murdering Michael.

At the inquest which follows strong evidence against Cuthbert is given. The latter also makes a statement. The verdict is one of "Wilful murder against Cuthbert Blakesley."

CHAPTER VIII. (*continued*).

"You are not about to leave us, I hope—not going to desert the neighbourhood altogether?" said Mr. Oakley, in some surprise at the only alternative that presented itself to him.

"No, indeed," replied Marion, half-smiling at the idea that she would turn her back on the place while Cuthbert was there and in trouble. "I was thinking that as Kennett's Cross was my father's home, and he has left it to me, I might go and live there for a time."

"What, in that lonely farmhouse, with all its recent and horrible associations! My dear young lady, you cannot be serious, or else you have not realized what your proposition entails!" exclaimed the manager, hardly believing that he had heard aright.

Marion quickly undeceived him. "I am not a nervous girl," she said firmly. "There is no reason why I should be afraid to live there now that all that was worth a robber's visit has been taken."

"But the place is old and out of repair—only one or two of the rooms are furnished," persisted Mr. Oakley.

"What was good enough for my father is good enough for me," returned Marion. "Do not, please, throw obstacles in my way," she went on pleadingly. "Why should I fritter away my slender resources in lodging expenses when I can save by living in a house of my own rent free? By my plan I can make the remnant of my father's money last for quite a long time, and surely it would be wrong in my place to spend unnecessarily."

She did not add that she wanted to economize in order to use as much of her money as might be needed in securing skilled assistance for Cuthbert, and that her "plan" arose in the first instance from an idea that on the scene of the crime she might effectually aid the defence. Though she had not yet finally decided how to set to work, Zambra and his achievements had been perpetually in her mind during the last two days, and her first thought on leaving "The Limes" had been that she would now be free to consult him, should she so elect, when and where she pleased.

In his prim regard for the conventional, Mr. Oakley held out for a good quarter of an hour, doing all he could to induce her to remain in the town, and when that failed he offered to go to Mrs. Bonfield and endeavour to bring her to a more charitable frame of mind, so that a return to "The Limes" would be possible. But that Marion would not hear of; her new-found independence was too valuable to be lightly yielded, and she remained resolute to her purpose, with the result that the manager gave in at last—"under protest," as he put it, and in the full expectation that a day or two of the solitary old house would drive her back to Reading.

"You will be bringing it here again within the week, with a request to find you a tenant," he said, as he handed her the clumsy key of her new abode.

Having gained her point, Marion engaged a fly to take her to her destination, and on her way stopped at "The Limes" to pick up the few things she had packed. The servant who brought them out said that she had been charged by her mistress to inquire where Miss Standridge was going to reside in future—a mode of expression that scarcely implied any present intention to retract.

"You can tell Mrs. Bonfield that I hope she will think as kindly of me as I do of her," was the reply. "I have adopted her suggestion, and am going to Kennett's Cross."

The woman stared with astonishment, and then retired with the message as Marion signed to the coachman to proceed. The carriage had not turned through the gates into the road, when the sounds of an "hysterical attack" in the house proclaimed the manner in which the emotional

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old woman had received the news and it was probably owing to the regretful feelings called up in the girl's mind by the wild weeping and laughter that she failed to notice a man who was lounging about outside the gates. He was an elderly man; a yellow-skinned, dissipated-looking man in black; a man with one cunning eye that sent twinkling glances after the carriage, while its fellow shone with a steady gleam in the direction of "The Limes."

"I wonder if that was her—and where she was going," he muttered to himself as he turned away towards Reading. "There seems to be someone ill or crazy in the house, and in any case I think I will postpone making my dear niece's acquaintance till to-morrow. I can burrow about a bit in the town to-night."

CHAPTER IX.

"UNCLE SIMON."

THUS it was that Marion found herself that same evening standing at the gate in the lane with the key of Kennett's Cross in her hand. She was quite alone; and as the Reading fly which had brought her drove away she could not but feel her loneliness—the deserted house loomed up so dark and grim in the grey twilight, seeming all the more gloomy from its recent associations.

But a large share of her father's adventurous spirit had fallen to the girl, and she consoled herself with the knowledge that she was not worth robbing. Surely with the disappearance of the supposed hoard Kennett's Cross must have ceased to be a centre of attraction to evil doers.

The funeral had taken place on the preceding day, and at the same time the police who had been in possession had been withdrawn, Inspector Dimmock having ransacked every hole and corner of the grounds in his endeavours to find the missing gold.

Mr. Oakley, as the dead man's representative, had had the place put to rights after the funeral, and Marion established herself in the front sitting-room, where her father had met his end. She deferred her exploration of the house till daylight should come to her aid, merely taking a look at the bedroom overhead, in which, as it was the only one furnished, she would have to pass the night. This done she set about making herself comfortable in a methodical way. She had brought some provisions with her, and was soon able to sit down to her first meal under her own roof.

It must not be thought that Marion was heartless because, even on the scene of the crime, she thought less of the deed that had deprived her of a father who was almost a stranger than of the terrible danger which menaced her lover. Marion, from her earliest years, from having to be hands and head to a silly old woman, had developed a matter-of-fact and self-reliant nature which in her present circumstances, was roused into full play, and she meant to devote herself rather to saving the living than to mourning for the dead. It would be time enough to render honour to her father's memory, she thought, when his murderer was in the hands of justice and Cuthbert was free.

When she had finished her tea, she drew a card from her pocket, and sat for a long time gazing abstractedly at an address which she had pencilled on the back, thus:

SEBASTIAN ZAMBRA.
300, Chandos Street,
Strand, W.C.

"I feel that I must have help, and now that I am my own mistress there is nothing to hinder," said Marion to herself at last. "I am glad I was so interested in the case when I read it in the *Standard*, that I made a note of the address, thinking that some day I might ask him to find my father. Zambra can be no common detective—common detectives are fools," she interpolated, with angry thoughts of Dimmock. "This man must have brains enough to look deeper than first appearances, and at least he will be on our side if I employ him."

She got up and paced the room excitedly, trying to come to a decision as how best to help in Cuthbert's defence. In her course she had to pass between the table and the mantelpiece, and so it happened that in her engrossment she turned too sharply, and with her sleeve dislodged a brown earthenware tobacco jar that was standing at the end of the shelf. The jar fell clattering on to the floor, but it was not broken. All the harm that was done was that the contents, about two ounces of coarse-cut cavendish tobacco and a wedge of doubled paper, were scattered about on the carpet.

Marion for the moment was grieved by an accident which reminded her so abruptly of her father's recent presence in the room, but, recovering herself, she stopped to replace the tobacco in the jar. She also gathered up the wedge of paper which she supposed had been used as an improvised "damper" to keep the contents of the jar moist and fresh. She was about to restore this also to its place, when a sudden impulse seized her to unfold it first. As she did so a cry of horror escaped her lips. The inside of the paper disclosed a dark red stain, exactly of the shape of a knife-blade, suggesting at once that it had been used by the murderer to wipe the fatal weapon.

Again a startled exclamation was forced from the trembling girl, when she saw that the paper was nothing more nor less than an envelope addressed to Cuthbert Blakesly at the Reading Bank, in the handwriting which the events of the previous week had familiarized her with as that of Michael Standridge.

Overcome by her discovery, Marion sank into the one armchair in the room, and tried, for her lover's sake, to collect her thoughts. After a little while she mastered her repulsion and examined the envelope more closely. It had passed through the post, and bore the dating stamp of the Wilmington rural sub-office, which was the nearest to Kennett's Cross. The date, May 9th, showed Marion at once that it was the missing envelope of the letter mentioned by Cuthbert at the inquest as having brought him to the house that night.

"This decides me," she said to herself. "Zambra must tell me what this means. Cuthbert relied so on that letter, as proving that it was not he who sought the interview, and this envelope should corroborate his story. And yet, that awful mark upon it! How can I unaided say if this chance of mine is for him or against him? I dare not produce the envelope till I know, and Zambra is the man to read between the lines. I will send to him in the morning."

Her mind once made up, she grew calmer. After carefully putting away the envelope in the bosom of her dress, she sat far into the night, jotting down every scrap of information her father had given her about his past life. It was very brief and very disconnected, and chiefly related to his adventures in foreign lands; but such as it was she noted every item as it occurred to her, in the hope that this Zambra of whom she had read might pick out somewhere from the mass of trifles a hidden clue. In her mental effort to remember every word that her father had said to her she forgot her solitude and escaped the nervousness which, well-braced, healthy girl as she was, on the first evening in that house might well overcome her. It was long past midnight when she went up the worm-eaten old staircase to bed, still so full of her task that the silence and the shadows had no terrors for her.

In the morning Marion woke betimes, and after an early breakfast walked into the village of Wilmington, whence she telegraphed to the address she had pencilled on the card, merely inquiring if Mr. Zambra would undertake the Kennett's Cross case in the interest of the relatives; and, if so, when he might be expected. To save time she waited about in the village till the answer came thus: "Certainly. Will be with you to-morrow early; engagement prevents to-day." Satisfied with her morning's work, Marion took the opportunity to make a few necessary purchases, and then made the best of her way back to explore the old house from end to end.

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She was very thorough in everything she did. Commencing with the ground floor, she made herself familiar with the great kitchen, the disused sitting-room, and with the quaint nooks and crannies of store-rooms behind the dairy, whence the rats scampered at her approach. Mr. Oakley had given her the key of the strong-room, but so much of the mystery of her father's death seemed to centre in the recesses of the cellar that she preferred to wait until she could examine it in Zambra's company. Beyond the few utensils which Michael's simply cookery had demanded, and the lumber in the second parlour, there was no signs of recent occupation anywhere outside the sitting-room—an air of mouldy desolation was over everything.

In the same way Marion went through the upstairs apartments, room by room, without finding traces of human presence anywhere but in her father's bedroom—now her own—and in a small empty chamber at the end of a passage, where the police had removed a plank from the floor to find the key.

The plank had not been replaced, but was still lying close to the aperture caused by its removal. Marion looked in and shuddered as there rose vividly before her mind's eye the picture of a felonious hand, fresh from the darker crime below, fumbling in the dusty hole in the dead of night. In the other rooms—small, low-ceiled chambers they were—there was nothing remarkable save the all-pervading emptiness.

Marion returned to her sitting-room, and after a little rest and refreshment went out into the wilderness of garden ground, and thence down to the upturned paddock, where she viewed with wonder the evidences of Michael's labour. The police, under orders from Inspector Dimmock, had increased the confusion of the scene by scattering Michael's neatly-stacked heaps of clay, and by demolishing the kiln in their search for the missing gold. Marion also looked into the empty stable, whence the pony had been removed by Mr. Oakley's orders to be sold for the benefit of the estate. Here, too, all was chaos, the very manger having been wrenched away by the persistent Dimmock.

The girl went back to the house listlessly. Now that she had seen all that there was to be seen time began to hang heavily on her hands, and she grew impatient for the morrow which should bring the detective. It was past five o'clock when she settled down in the parlour again to busy herself with preparations for a solitary woman's principal luxury—her cup of afternoon tea. She was trying to induce Michael's old camp kettle to boil when suddenly there came over her the feeling that someone was looking at her. Turning instinctively, she saw that the gaze she had felt came from a person who was standing outside the window, on the garden path, peering into the room.

All that she took in for the moment was that her spectator was an elderly man of slight build, dressed in rather shabby black clothes, and that one of his eyes seemed to be fixed on a spot in the centre of the room, while the other roved round restlessly, fastening first on one object, then on another.

Directly he perceived that she was aware of his presence he began to nod his head and smile, in a manner which Marion supposed was meant to be reassuring. Still continuing to bow and mouth and grin he gesticulated towards the front door, as if to convey that he desired admission. But he said never a word, though he could easily have been heard through the window. Marion thought it was just possible it might be Zambra himself, arrived before his time; or, if not, it might be a messenger from Mr. Oakley, or even Cuthbert's lawyer. At any rate, there was nothing alarming about the nodding, smiling figure, and it would be daylight for an hour or two; so Marion motioned to the front door, and went herself to open it.

No sooner was she confronted by her strange visitor than the cause of his silence was revealed. The lean-visaged man, with one wandering and one steadfast eye, was labouring under intense emotion. For some seconds, still bowing and grimacing, he appeared to be struggling for words which would not come; and when at last the skinny, yellow throat emitted a few husky tones, they quavered as though with suppressed tears. But it was what he said rather than the manner of saying it that astonished Marion.

"My dear niece! My poor murdered brother's child!" he croaked, opening his arms expectantly. "Ah, you do not know me, of course—even by reputation, I fear," he went on, when Marion hung back, far too self-possessed to respond to the invitation, "nevertheless I am your father's brother. Is it possible that he never mentioned me?"

"My poor father said but little about his family during the few days I knew him," said Marion. "He did not tell me that he had a brother."

"Poor dear Michael! and yet we played as boys together," murmured the visitor. "Yes, my dear, I am your Uncle Simon—the Reverend Simon Standridge, as known to the world—a humble servant of the Lord, and accounted a passable preacher, though a weak vessel. Let me hand you my credentials, dear niece. You cannot be too particular in your present sad position," he added, as though anxious to make excuses for her lack of enthusiasm.

He produced and handed to her a visiting card, on which was printed:—

The Reverend S. Standridge,
Norton Delaval Rectory,
Yorkshire.

Ready-witted girl as Marion was, she was too much of a woman to withstand the evidence of printer's ink. There was no longer a shadow of distrust in her mind, and though she did not up to the present feel particularly drawn to her relative, she felt that she could not do less than ask him into the house. On the threshold of the sitting-room, cocking his movable eye inquiringly, Uncle Sam ejaculated, "The scene of the—the lamentable occurrence?" and on receiving Marion's hushed affirmative, sank groaning into the armchair. It was sometime before he recovered himself, then he said:

"I knew nothing of it till I read it in the paper yesterday. You see papers don't reach my quiet parsonage till they are two or three days old. I did not even know that Michael was in England till I read of his death. I came away at once in the hope of being in time for the funeral—of being allowed to—ah! perform the last blessed rites, perhaps—but I found that the obsequies took place the day before yesterday. Inquiries led me to Mrs. Bonfield's, by whom I was told that you were here, so I came on to proffer you my feeble assistance."

"It is very good of you," said Marion, "but I do not think you can help me, unless you know who murdered my father?"

"Would that I did! Would that I did!" sighed the Reverend Simon Standridge. "But I can tell you something else," he added more briskly. "I can tell you who did not murder him, and that is the young fellow who is in custody on the charge. Of course, I only know what appeared in the papers, but if that is true his arrest was an outrage, my dear. Rural police can be stupid, I know, but I could not have believed them guilty of this egregious folly. Why, he is innocent on the face of it."

Whether wittingly or not, "Uncle Simon" had taken the straight cut to Marion's good will. He believed in Cuthbert. That was enough for Marion, and her heart warmed to the odd creature in the armchair. She never dared to wonder by what process he had come to the conclusion so strictly at variance with the evidence produced. She did not think it in the least strange that he had formed this friendly opinion about one whom he could never have seen; she only knew she would have hated him if he had believed in Cuthbert's guilt, strong proof against her lover though there was. But "Uncle Simon" declared him innocent, and Marion melted accordingly.

She got up and put another cup on the table, and pressed

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her visitor to join her at tea. Her invitation was gratefully, and even eagerly received, but just as she was about to fill the cup, her guest checked her with a request to half fill it only. At the same time he fished out from the tail pocket of his seedy black frockcoat a large flask, from which he plentifully diluted his tea with brown brandy, saying as he did so:

"I need not apologize, my dear, I am sure. I take this nasty stuff under medical advice—spasms, you know."

Marion would have forgiven him anything just then, so he took his "nasty stuff" and took it with a relish. He did not replace the flask in his pocket, but stood it on the mantelpiece not far from the brown tobacco jar. The spasms were of a recurrent nature, he explained.

During the conversation which followed, Uncle Simon dove-tailed his sympathetic offers of assistance with speculative surmises about the author of the crime, more especially with regard to the method adopted by the latter for carrying off the missing money. Though he so stoutly maintained his belief in Cuthbert's innocence, he seemed to have formed no definite notion as to who was the real murderer. One moment he suggested a tramp, only to alter his opinion in the next breath in favour of a London burglar. Notwithstanding these conjectures, he evinced very great interest in the hunt instituted by Inspector Dimmock throughout the premises, and he plied Marion with questions about the places which had and had not been searched.

She pointed out to him at last that, convinced as they both were that Cuthbert had no hand in the matter, there was no reason why they should seriously discuss the fruitless efforts of the police in that direction. The search was a wild-goose chase, foredoomed to failure, for the simple reason that there was nothing to be found. Whoever had planned the murder had doubtless also successfully planned to carry the plunder clear away. Marion very nearly alluded to the expected aid of the detective she had summoned, but she checked herself. Even the affability of her elderly relative should not prevail upon her to speak of Zambra's coming. All her hopes were centred in the latter now, and he should have a fair field to set to work in his own way, absolutely unknown to anyone.

Uncle Simon listened gravely, complimenting his "dear niece" on her superior wisdom, and made no more inconsistent references to possible hiding-places. He quite agreed that the question of search had only arisen because Cuthbert had come on a bicycle, and because it was impossible for him to have carried off such a weight of gold in that fashion.

"Silly of me to be wondering about my dear brother's stolen savings," he said. "Of course they were taken miles away that same night—probably in a cart."

It was about this time that Uncle Simon produced a briar-wood pipe, and after rummaging his pockets, apparently in vain, for the wherewithal to fill it, cast his eye suddenly on the tobacco jar in which Marion had found the envelope. Taking down the jar with a little cry of surprised relief, he plunged his hand among the contents and withdrew a modicum of the tobacco. Just then the eccentricity of his eyes was very noticeable. While his hand was in the jar his fixed eye never left Marion's face, though the other was busily following the action of his hands. At the sight of the black, coarse-cut cavendish, however, his expression changed to one of rueful disgust, and he replaced the jar without filling his pipe.

"Won't do for me, my dear," he said. "Poor Michael! Cut cavendish, you see. All very well for an old traveller, but too strong for a mild, old clergyman. Speaks well for the police that they didn't help themselves to this fine-flavoured stuff. I wouldn't mind laying a wager, though, that they rummaged the jar for missing keys—and things?"

Marion had very good reason for knowing that the police had not searched the jar, but she meant her policy of silence to apply doubly to the envelope, and she made no reply.

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The conversation was changed, but the eye remained fixed for quite a long while on Marion's face after this little interlude.

Nine o'clock came and Marion had long since lit the lamp and drawn the blind, yet Uncle Simon still sat on. She began to wonder when her visitor would go, for the nearest sleeping accommodation was at Reading, seven miles away; and as he had come on foot he would presumably have to walk the distance. Suddenly, after an extra cordial invitation to come and stay with him at his "humble Yorkshire parsonage," he rose to take his leave. But in the midst of his farewells he paused and clapped his hand to his stomach; then sank, groaning, into the chair, with every indication of intense pain.

"An attack," he murmured. "One of my worst attacks, I fear," and for some minutes he swayed to and fro, and writhed this way and that, greatly to Marion's alarm. At length he seemed to recover a little, but only to fall back in a state of collapse.

"I am afraid it is useless to attempt to move," he groaned. "When I am taken this way there is nothing for it but complete rest. But what shall I do? I shall be putting you to a sad convenience, I fear."

Marion was obliged to confess that she had no bed to offer him, but she could do no less than place the couch in the sitting-room at his disposal for the night. Even had she not been so well disposed towards him she could hardly have turned a suffering man—an elderly relative, too—out of doors at that time of night with a seven mile walk before him.

She apologized for the hardness of the horse-hair sofa but, such as it was, heartily invited him to make use of it.

Uncle Simon showed a good deal of sensitiveness on the subject of what he called his unfortunate intrusion, but in the end he gratefully accepted the arrangement. How he longed for the time to come when he should be able to repay his dear niece's kindness by entertaining her in his beloved home among the Yorkshire wolds.

So it was when Marion went up to bed at eleven o'clock she left her guest below. He was already stretched on the couch and snoring soundly when she quitted the room.

CHAPTER X.

ZAMBRA THE DETECTIVE.

THE night passed quietly at Kennett's Cross with two trifling exceptions.

Marion had been asleep for a couple of hours when she was awakened by a sound as of the banging of a distant door. The noise which woke her, though loud, was of so brief a duration that it had passed away before she was sufficiently aroused to locate its origin, but her impression was that the sound came from the end of the passage opposite her bedroom.

There was a good deal of wind blowing, and Marion attributed the disturbance, if she had not dreamt it, to a sudden gust striking the draughty old house, and slamming the door of one of the empty rooms.

After listening in vain for a repetition of the sound, she fell asleep again, to be awakened, however, towards the small hours of the morning by distinct footsteps in the sitting-room below. Fearing that her visitor might have been taken ill again, and in need of assistance, she unlocked her bedroom door and opened it a little way.

The dawn was just beginning to break outside, but in the house all was as yet in darkness, save that a streak of yellow light on the stairs showed that the door of the sitting-room was open, and that the lamp was burning there. The footsteps had ceased.

Marion called down, "Are you ill? Can I do anything for you?"

The only answer she got was the sudden cessation of the lamplight, suggesting that the sitting-room door had either been closed very quietly or that the lamp had been extinguished. After waiting fully a minute she called down again, louder this time, with the result that the door below was rather noisily opened, the light reappeared, and Uncle Simon's voice was heard croaking:

"Is that you, my dear?"

"I heard you moving about," Marion said; "are you still unwell?"

"Better, much better, dear niece, thank you," came the reply, "only too restless to sleep much. But there is no need for alarm. I beg of you not to disturb yourself."

Marion went back to bed relieved.

"I suppose he did not hear me call the first time, though his door was certainly open then," she said to herself. "He must have opened it to get more air, and I expect I chanced to hear him when he went to close it in the chill of the morning."

When the two met later, Uncle Simon professed himself restored to health, and, after sharing Marion's frugal breakfast, expressed his intention of taking his departure for the present. He had business which would detain him in London for some little time, he said, but he would certainly take an early opportunity of running down to see his dear niece again, and perhaps he would be able to help her in clearing that poor persecuted young man's character—who could tell? Mrs. Bonfield had told him of her difference with Marion and the cause of it, and he assured his dear niece once more that Mr. Blakesly's cause was his cause—that he would never rest till he was at liberty.

Marion did not attempt to restrain his departure, for her mind was full of her coming interview with the detective, and she had not formed a very high opinion of the assistance proffered so freely by her new relative. She was quite sure he meant well—if he had not been so peculiar in appearance, his staunch belief in Cuthbert might have induced her to call him "a dear old thing"—but to the girl's shrewd common sense, only clouded in one particular, there seemed to be a little too much gush about Uncle Simon. She took leave of him at the garden gate, and he had gone some little way along the lane towards the high road when he called to her.

"By the way, if you want to communicate with me, don't write to Yorkshire. My housekeeper is instructed not to forward letters. I will send you an address in London to which to write in a day or two when I get settled."

Marion nodded and stood looking after the shabby, black-coated figure till it disappeared round a bend in the lane.

The morning was pleasant and spring-like, with the scent of distant hayfields in the air, and she delayed her return to the house to stroll for a while in the tangled wilderness that had once been a front garden. Uncle Simon had been gone, perhaps ten minutes when, without any warning, she became aware that a man was standing at the gate watching her.

The stranger was dressed in a well-cut suit of quiet tweeds, and he wore a hard felt hat. He was slightly over the middle height, and when he removed his hat Marion was struck by the wonderful resemblance of his features to the portraits of the first Napoleon. The temples covered with long, smooth, straight hair, the cheeks hollow up to the inner angle of the eye, the projecting cheek bones, the massive jaw, the sinuous mobile lips pressed together as if in attention, the large, clear eyes deeply sunk under the broad, arched brows, the oblique look as penetrating as a rapier, the frown of determined will—all combined to counterfeit the popular conception of the great Emperor.

But, even while Marion looked, the likeness vanished, for the stranger smiled as he met her inquiring glance, and the whole expression of his face differed at once from that of his great prototype. The face remained shrewd and practical, but it showed itself capable of kindliness and even sympathy, and Marion was glad, because she rightly divined that this was Zambra, the detective.

"I think I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Stand-

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Manager, POPULAR HOME JOURNAL, B.G., 4 Gray's Inn Road, LONDON, W.C.

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ridge," he said, coming through the gate to meet her. "I am here in consequence of your telegram; let me produce it as a credential," and he put the form into her hand.

Marion just glanced at it and gave it back. "I am so pleased that you have come," she said. "We had better go into the house for our talk, had we not? Very few people come along the lane, but you might not like to run the chance of being seen."

"In the house by all means," said Zambra; "but stay a moment. There has been a great trampling here recently. Surely, the police did not allow the place to be overrun with sightseers?"

"I heard there was a great crowd on the day of the inquest which was held there," said Marion.

"The old story!" exclaimed Zambra. "They have got enough evidence to justify an arrest, and so they are cocksure that the man they have arrested is the man, and that no further precaution need be taken. Has it rained in this district lately?"

"There was a heavy shower on Saturday morning—the day of the discovery," replied Marion.

"Ah!" said Zambra, "that shower may have its advantages as well as its drawbacks. It may even override the stupidity of the police in permitting the mob to spoil the ground, but stupidity is none the less annoying because harmless. Perhaps I had better settle this before we go indoors, for it is really important. Allow me one moment."

And before Marion fully understood his intention he had left her side to step quickly to the corner of the house on the inhabited sitting-room side. Between the house and the path running round it, there was a narrow space of soil about two feet wide that had once been a flower border, but was now overgrown with weeds. To this border, just at the angle of the house, Zambra paid the closest attention, scrutinizing the earth and examining with deft fingers the tendrils of the twining convolvulus that grew there. He then went to the other front corner of the house, beyond the empty lumber-room, and repeated the process still more carefully, but Marion thought, judging from the contraction of his brows, without seeing what he expected.

He was on his way to rejoin her when his eye fastened on the laurel bush that grew between the corner of the house and the lumber-room window.

"This is all in the day's work. You will not mind waiting, Miss Standridge," he said, and again he was stooping and peering this time under and among the branches of the ragged evergreen.

Suddenly he went down upon his knees, and, taking out a magnifying-glass, held it inch by inch over every foot of the ground between the shrub and the house. Then he rose, and in answer to Marion's look of expectation, said:

"Yes, I have seen what I expected—what I hoped—to see! but it will be best to refer to it in its proper place. I am at your service."

He followed her into the sitting-room, his eyes noting every little detail as they passed through the bare, unfurnished hall.

"This is the room where my father was found," said Marion. "I am compelled to occupy it for the present, because it is the only apartment habitable on the ground floor."

Zambra had sat up late the previous night reading all the published reports of the case, and he did not attempt to repress his admiration for the brave girl who had taken up her abode amid such terrible associations to serve her lover's cause.

"Your motive for living here alone must be a very strong one," he replied. "As there must be no half-confidences between us, you will pardon my saying that I have guessed it already. Mr. Blakesly was very unnecessarily made to refer to you at the inquest."

"The immediate cause of my coming here was a quarrel about this case with the lady who has had the care of me from childhood—a quarrel which I greatly regret," said Marion. "But in one way I was glad of the opportunity, because I thought that I might be of more use here. I hardly know what to think now. It is quite true that I—that I believe in Mr. Blakesly's innocence, and—and have set myself to prove it," she added, faltering a little for the first time at the admission; "but I have made a discovery which seems more likely to do him harm than good."

As she spoke she handed Zambra the blood-stained envelope which she had found in the tobacco jar, and explained the circumstances of its discovery.

"It is undoubtedly the envelope of the letter which invited Mr. Blakesly to come out here on the night of the murder, and so far corroborates his story," she continued; "but I dared not produce it with that dreadful stain."

Zambra did not reply at once. He had walked over to the window, and was scrutinizing the envelope closely from every possible point of view. Then, flattening it out against the glass, he had recourse to his lens again, and subjected the crumpled paper to the most minute examination. Marion watched patiently, but it was not until he had been thus engaged fully five minutes that he turned to her, and throwing the envelope on the table said very quietly:

"Miss Standridge, I am not in the habit of indulging in cheap cant, so you may believe me when I say that Providence is with us. In the hands of the police that envelope would have hanged Mr. Blakesly; in my hands I have hopes that it will not only save him, but lead us to the actual murderer. Curious, too," he added with a smile, "that we should be indebted for this prospect to the laxity of the police in not conducting a thorough search. I suppose each was afraid the other would think he was helping himself, and fought shy of the tobacco jar accordingly."

"Thank Heaven I sent for you!" exclaimed Marion. "This is good news indeed. But tell me whom you suspect."

"No one at present," replied Zambra. "I only know that the prisoner had no hand in this crime—more than that, that he is himself a victim, and I will tell you why. But one question first. You recognise the address on the envelope as being in your father's writing?"

"Oh, yes," said Marion, "I recognised it at once. I had several notes from my father during the week after he found me. Besides, you see the postmark and date tally."

"Exactly," said Zambra; "and now, before we go any further on the track of the right man, I will tell you why I have come to the conclusion that Mr. Blakesly is the wrong one. I formed a rough theory last Tuesday morning on reading the account of the inquest—long before I knew I was to be connected with the case. I will say at once that what influenced me was the nature of Mr. Cuthbert Blakesly's defence. The cat story was simply too preposterous not to be true. I mean that a criminal capable of planning such a subtle crime would have planned a more probable excuse for the condition of his clothes and his bicycle than the fantastic reason which this unfortunate young gentleman has given. Forty hours elapsed between his arrest and the inquest, and it is an insult to any intelligent person—cornered as Mr. Blakesly would have been had he been guilty—to suppose that in that interval, in the seclusion of a police cell, he could not have devised a better tale than that."

(To be continued.)

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Reader, have you ever stopped to consider why some persons are so successful; why everything they touch seems to turn to gold; why they acquire wealth, position, power and influence without any seemingly great effort on their part? Such persons surround themselves with friends, are honored and respected in their communities; are sought after in society, and gain prominence and distinction without apparently trying. Have you ever considered these things? Do you know why?

WHAT BRINGS SUCCESS

Not hard work, for the poor work harder than the rich. Not birth, because many of our successful men are of lowly parentage. Not luck, for many a lucky man dies friendless and poor. We will tell you why. The secret of success in life is personal influence—the ability to make others think as you do; to win their confidence and friendship and get them to help you. There is a secret power by which you can wield an irresistible personal influence; by which you may overcome all obstacles, charm and fascinate whom you will; by which you may cure every known disease and bad habit without the aid of drugs, medicines or the surgeon's knife. It is called personal Magnetism or Hypnotism. It is the basis of success in every business and calling.

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

Turn to the first page. You will there observe that an important change has been made in *Short Stories*. Every week, from to-day on, a complete novel will be comprised in each number.

For this feature I have been fortunate enough to secure some of the ablest and most popular writers of the day. Altogether, we may say that *Short Stories* now provides by far the best pennyworth of good, wholesome fiction to be obtained. Tell your friends about the new feature. Also kindly write in and tell me what you think of it.

The brilliant series of stories now drawing to a conclusion, entitled, "A Keeper of Secrets" has won for Mr. Norman Silver many additional thousands of admirers. Those who have read the series, and who remember the same author's entrancing novels, "Hate, the Destroyer," and "A Daughter of Mystery," will welcome with delight the information that Norman Silver is just now putting the finishing touches to a brand new novel, written especially for *Short Stories*. This story, the title of which is at present a secret so profound that even Mr. Pontifex himself would have been puzzled to discover it, will run in serial form through these pages. Further particulars will be announced in due time.

"E. E. E."—The flower perfume trade has reached immense proportions in Europe. In the vicinity of Nice alone the value of the product of flowers for perfume and for seed-raising for large wholesale establishments reaches the equal of about £400,000 a year. The larger portion goes for distilling perfumes, although much attention is given to raising specialities in the flower line for seedsmen. The flowers raised consist chiefly of orange flowers, rose petals, jasmines, peppermint, and lavender. Violets are also largely raised for perfumery purposes.

"Sandy" asks me the question, "What does a lion weigh?"

Ask that question of any acquaintance and see what he will say. Those who know the look of the king of beasts best, and how small his lithe body really is, will probably come furthest from the truth. About 300 to 350 pounds is a usual estimate. But this is below the mark. A full-grown lion will tip the scale at no less than 500 pounds. Five hundred and forty pounds is the record for an African lion. His bone is solid and heavy as ivory.

The tiger runs the lion very close. A Bengal tiger, killed two years ago by an English officer, scaled 520 pounds. A tiger of this size has, however, considerably greater muscular strength than the biggest lion. Few people know that a grizzly bear can give points to any other carnivorous animal in point of strength. A grizzly bear weighing just four hundredweight has been watched carrying a heifer of more than two-thirds its own weight for two miles up the most steep and rugged mountain-side, and this without pausing for one instant for rest. The grizzly bear is the largest and most powerful of all the bear tribe, but his cousin, the cinnamon bear, runs him very close, and the big white Polar bear, though not really so dangerous a customer, is capable of performing the most extraordinary feats of strength. A Polar bear has been seen to move with his paws a boulder six men had with difficulty put in position to guard a store of provisions.

Here is a letter from a lady on the subject of beards, which at the present time seem to be going out of fashion among men. Perhaps somebody has something to say on the other side of the question:

"A man without a beard looks like a house without blinds, a horse without a mane, or any other incomplete affair. It is not uncommon for the throat and eye disease to punish the man who shaves, not to mention the tears and wry faces he knows, in consequence of resisting beard or dull razor.

"Only consider all that a man will go through in order to deprive himself of protection and his greatest dignity and beauty—as not infrequently a full, well-cared-for beard is. My husband never shaves. He never did shave. And permit me to tell you that the man who never shaves has a soft beard, silky as the hair of the head, and instead of growing down over the mouth as the beard does being cut till it becomes as stiff as a broom, it inclines to the right and left.

"Akin to shaving—a barbarism which should be hunted from the world—is the custom of cutting the hair so close that the scalp shines through. It is injurious as well as disfiguring. The hair is a conductor of electricity to the brain, and it should never be less than two inches in length. Unless the facts in the case are taught in the schools, so that boys are warned, in a few generations more we shall have a general softening of the brain among our masculine population. There is more than one sign of the near danger. Give us back the beard, the majestic, flowing beard, and spare us the hairless head until age renders it natural and reverend."

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 4,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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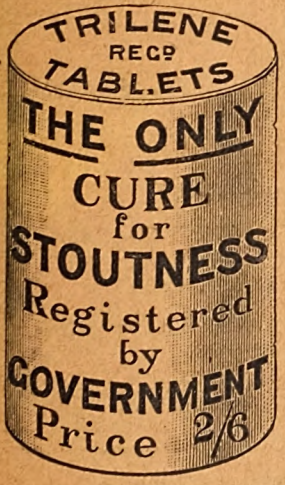

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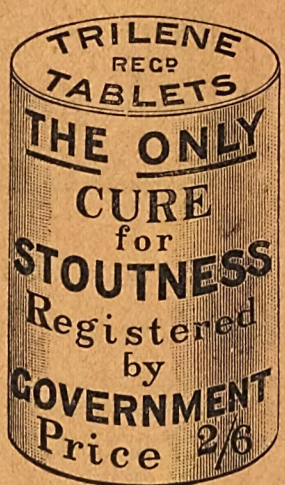

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"67 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.
"Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely. You have our united thanks, and if I can do anything to promote your interests I will freely use my utmost endeavours to do so.
"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

MRS. DARNLEY SMITH, Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, writes: "Trilene Tablets have reduced my weight very much. I am so much lighter in every way, and better in health."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st. and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

"77 Hindhill Street, Heywood, February 5th, 1898.
"Gentlemen,—I have not quite finished the box of Tablets and am 2lb. lighter. The change is great, and several friends are beginning the treatment, which not only reduces fat but strengthens rheumatic joints—such has been the case with me. "Yours sincerely, M. A. HEYWOOD."

MRS. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholme Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."
West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

MR. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

MR. MCLEOD, 44, Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

A. M. PRATT of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

MRS. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

MR. WALKER, 236 London Road, Hazelgrove, Stockport, says: "I have used one box and am 14lb. lighter. Send another soon as possible."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs, says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

MRS E. ALEXANDER, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They have reduced me quite 2 stone, and I am now quite cured."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

MRS. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Mrs. TAYLOR-ROBINSON, of Tweed Green House, Whalley Range, Manchester, says: "I feel so much lighter and better since taking your Tablets, and am so much thinner that I hardly recognise myself."

Miss A. LONG, of 9 South Parade, Waterford, writes: "Your Tablets have reduced me 14lb."

Miss A. DAWSON, 62 Orchard Street, Weston-super-Mare, says: "Glad to say the Tablets have sufficiently reduced me. I shall always recommend them."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

Mrs. DREW, of 1 Bellevue Gardens, The Nursery, Devizes, writes: "I took Tablets some years ago; they soon reduced me and I have not got stout since. Send me a box for my mother."

THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, 66 FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

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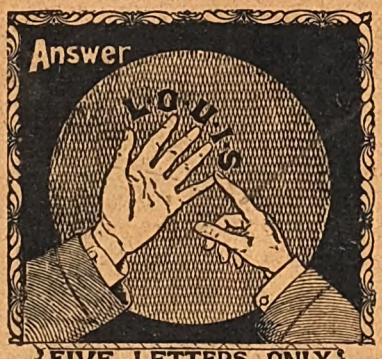

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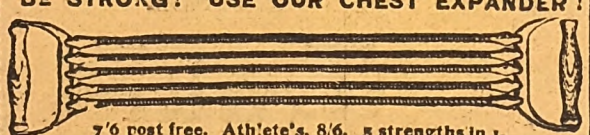

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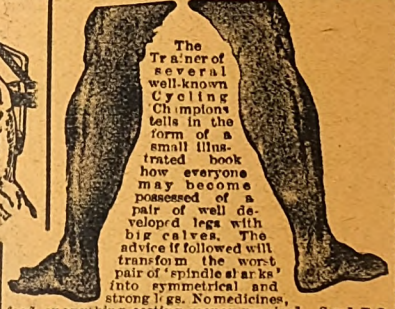

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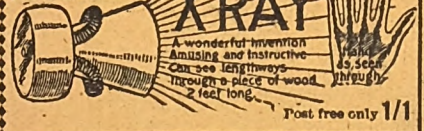

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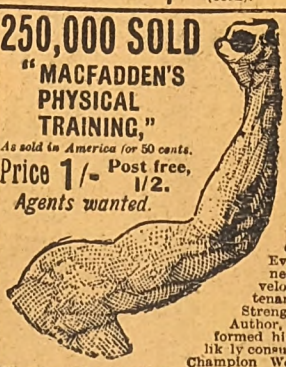

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 647.] For the Week Ending May 25th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

At the Eleventh Hour.

He reeled as though he had been struck. For one brief instant he regarded Nora and her companion with a stare of horrified incredulity.

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AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

CHAPTER I.

A Bitter Awakening.

"I will not pretend that this comes as a surprise to me, Mr. Meredith. To be perfectly frank with you, I have been expecting this visit for several days and so far as I have any influence with Nora, it shall be used on your behalf."

The scene was an elegantly furnished drawing-room in a picturesque old house in Bundoran, a little watering-place on the west coast of Ireland.

The speaker was Mrs. Carew, a middle-aged woman, clad in the sombre garb of a newly-made widow; and the person she addressed was a young English artist named Adrian Meredith, who had made a practice for the last half-dozen years of spending a considerable portion of the summer in the neighbourhood of Bundoran, and who, in the year of which we write, had arrived there exactly a fortnight before our story opens.

"I am delighted to find that I can count on your goodwill and sympathy," he replied. "I feared that you might resent my request, seeing that Miss Carew's father has only been dead three months; and I was also afraid, if I must confess the truth, that you would think I had scarcely known your daughter long enough to warrant me in asking her to be my wife."

"You have certainly seen very little of each other," assented Mrs. Carew. "Though you have been a regular visitor to Bundoran, this is the first year, I believe, that you and she have met."

"That is so," he said. "I can only suppose that I must have been blind in former years! Anyhow, I have seen her now, and I am sufficiently cognizant of my own feelings to know that my whole life's happiness depends upon the answer which she gives to the question which I am about to put to her."

"Which is a hint, I suppose, that you are impatient for me to send her in to you!" said Mrs. Carew. "Before I do so, however, there is something which I think I ought to tell you. You spoke just now of the late Mr. Carew as Nora's father and of myself as her mother."

"Oh, well, of course I know that you are really a stepmother," he explained.

"No, I am not even that," she answered. "Neither was Mr. Carew her father. She was washed ashore during a terrible storm about nineteen years ago and to this day nobody knows who her parents were. At that time, as you doubtless know, Mr. Carew was rector of Bundoran, and he and his wife adopted the foundling and christened her Nora. When she was twelve years of age the first Mrs. Carew died and five years later the rector married me. He died, as you know, a little over three months ago, and his death has left me in such straitened circumstances that it will be quite impossible for me to give Nora anything in the shape of a dowry."

Adrian Meredith glanced significantly round the expensively furnished drawing-room before he replied, and then he said:

"Believe me, Mrs. Carew, you do me a serious injustice if you imagine that I have ever thought of money in connection with Miss Carew. It is a matter of the utmost indifference to me who her parents were, or how much money she possesses. So long as I can gain her love my heart's desire will be fulfilled."

"Then there is another matter to which I must refer, in order to put you on your guard," continued Mrs. Carew. "You have heard of Lord Fedamore no doubt. He lives at Castle Fedamore, about two miles from Bundoran. He is a typical example of a bankrupt Irish peer, and is rapidly drinking himself into his grave.

"His eldest son, and consequently the heir to the title and the heavily-mortgaged estate, is the Honourable Mervyn Blake who is at present travelling in Russia as the representative of a wealthy English syndicate. He and Nora have known each other ever since they were children together, and the silly girl has got it into her head that Mervyn Blake is in love with her! Of course, I have all along pointed out to her that it was ridiculous to suppose that he, whose only hope of financial salvation lies in marrying a wealthy heiress, would marry a penniless orphan like Nora, and recent events have gone far to prove that I was right."

"And may I venture to ask what those events are?" asked Meredith.

"Certainly. You have every right to know," she replied. "Up to the time of the rector's death, Nora and Mervyn had written to each other almost every day, and as a matter of course she wrote to inform him of the loss she had sustained. For reasons best known to himself, he never answered her letter, and although three months have now elapsed she has never received a single line from him since. What construction she places on his silence I do not know, but for my part I think the explanation is simplicity itself. He has evidently succeeded in capturing some grand lady of the Russian world, and consequently he now desires to put an end to the harmless flirtation of his boyish days. Don't you think that is a very probable explanation?"

He replied in the affirmative, and a few minutes later she departed in search of Nora.

It must here be explained that the second Mrs. Carew, unlike the first, had always looked upon Nora as an alien and a stranger. Her selfish, grasping nature had grudged every penny that Mr. Carew had expended on his adopted daughter; but so long as the worthy rector had been alive she had never dared to make open protest. When he died, however, she mentally resolved that she would get rid of the girl as soon as she could invent a pretext for doing so, and Adrian Meredith's proposal seemed to her to afford her the very opportunity for which she was waiting.

"Mr. Meredith wishes to speak with you in the drawing-room," she said.

"With me?" said Nora.

"Yes, with you!" said Mrs. Carew sharply. "You need not pretend to be surprised by the announcement!"

"I am not pretending," said Nora with quiet dignity. "I have given Mr. Meredith such unmistakable hints that his attentions are distasteful to me that I am both pained and surprised that he should persist in annoying me. I shall certainly decline to see him!"

"You will do nothing of the kind!" retorted Mrs.

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Carew. "Are you aware that he has come to ask you to be his wife?"

"I guessed as much!" said Nora.

"Then kindly understand that I insist upon you accepting him!" said Mrs. Carew. "Whatever claims you may have had on my husband, you have none on me, and it would be unreasonable to expect me to support you any longer. I have been willing to provide for you until you found a husband, and if you refuse Mr. Meredith's offer of marriage I shall consider my obligation at an end, and shall repudiate all further responsibility for your future welfare!"

"I had no suspicion until this moment that you regarded me in the light of an unwelcome dependant," answered Nora. "Now that I know the truth I assure you that I will not burden you with my presence an hour longer than is absolutely necessary!"

"We are not taking part in an Adelphi melodrama!" said Mrs. Carew. "We are discussing a matter that concerns your future welfare, and there is not the slightest necessity for either of us to lose our tempers, or indulge in heroics! All I wish to point out is that you are now of an age when I have every right to expect you to relieve me of the burden of your support. If Mr. Carew had been a sensible man he would have given you such an education as would have fitted you to earn your own livelihood, but seeing that he chose to bring you up as a young lady of fortune your only hope of providing for your future is to marry someone with a decent income. As for Mervyn Blake, you may as well dismiss all thought of him from your mind. He has evidently realized the necessity of marrying money, and I, for one, do not blame him!"

"That is a question which I do not choose to discuss with you!" said Nora. "If it is your desire that I should see Mr. Meredith I will do so, but it will only be wasting time!"

"Nevertheless, it is certainly my wish that you should see him," said Mrs. Carew. "You will find him waiting for you in the drawing-room, and I trust you will see the advisability of giving him the answer he desires."

He rose when she entered the drawing-room, and made her a sweeping bow.

"Good afternoon. Miss Carew," he said, "Mrs. Carew has doubtless told you——"

"Yes, she has told me everything," she interrupted. "I had hoped that my attitude towards you during the past fortnight would have shown you that it is utterly impossible that there can ever be any closer bond between us than that of mere acquaintanceship. I cannot believe that I have failed to make this clear to you, and I trust therefore, that you will allow the matter to rest where it stands at present, and not compel me to express my sentiments in more definite terms."

"It is impossible for me to accept your suggestion," he exclaimed, suddenly catching her hand and holding it in spite of her protests. "To relinquish my suit in the spiritless fashion you suggest would be to cast a grave reflection on the depth of the love I bear towards you! I am aware that you have done your best to discourage me, but my love is proof against all rebuffs and is bound to triumph in the end. You may not love me now, but when you have cast the image of Mervyn Blake out of your heart——"

"Enough!" she cried, snatching away her hand and confronting him with blazing eyes. "I forbid you to drag Mr. Blake's name into the discussion!"

"I am sorry to disregard your prohibition," he answered calmly. "I would willingly spare you the anguish of the revelation I am about to make, but it would be cowardly on my part and unjust to you to leave you in ignorance of Mr. Blake's real character.

"Mr. Blake, as you know, has been in Russia for several months and I hear from Mrs. Carew that he has lately ceased to write to you. You have doubtless indulged in a good many speculations as to the reason of his sudden coldness, but I doubt if you have ever, even in your most despondent moments, imagined him to be guilty of such baseness as he has actually displayed."

He drew a copy of the London DAILY TELEGRAPH from his pocket and was holding it out towards her.

"Read that," he said, pointing to a paragraph on the fifth page.

She took the paper from his hand and allowed her eyes to wander over the paragraph he had pointed out. And this is what she read:

"On Tuesday last, at the Church of the Transfiguration in St. Petersburg, the Hon. Mervyn Blake, only son of Lord Fedamore, of Castle Fedamore, Co. Donegal, Ireland, was married, according to the Greek rites, to the Princess Olga Dianovitch, only daughter and heiress of the late Prince Dianovitch. We understand that the happy couple have already left the Russian capital *en route* for Ireland, where the honeymoon will be spent."

It was a bitter blow, and it says much for Nora's pride that she bore it without flinching. Though her heart was well-nigh breaking she scorned to let Adrian Meredith see the anguish she was suffering, and there was scarcely a tremor in her voice as she handed back the paper with an unemotional "Thank you."

"Well, what do you think of Mervyn Blake now?" he asked.

"I am not aware that my opinion of Mr. Blake is a matter in which you have any concern," she answered.

Her calmness completely upset his calculations, and before he had recovered his wonted composure the housemaid appeared to show him to the door.

"You have not seen the last of me," he whispered to Nora. "I will give you until to-morrow afternoon to think over what I have told you, and then I will call again."

She made no reply, for her self-command was almost exhausted, and she dared not trust herself to speak lest her agony should betray itself. Pale, proud, and silent, she watched him across the room; but as soon as the door had closed behind him her overstrained nerves gave way, and she burst into a flood of scalding tears.

CHAPTER II.

THE FLIGHT.

SCARCELY had Adrian Meredith taken his departure ere Nora heard Mrs. Carew approaching the drawing-room with the object, no doubt, of learning the result of the interview. As her stepmother was the last person in the world whom she desired to see just then, she made her escape by another door, hurried upstairs and locked herself in her bedroom.

Here she flung herself on the bed and abandoned herself to unrestrained grief. It was quite true, as Mrs. Carew had said, that she and Mervyn Blake had known each other from childhood. It was Mervyn who taught her to fish, to ride, and to row. When he had left Bundoran and had gone to college, it was to Nora that his longest letters had been written, and it was with Nora—his "little sweetheart" as he had called her

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—that the greater part of his holidays had been spent.

After leaving college he had gone to London in order to qualify as an electrical engineer; but all its gaieties had proved unequal to the task of effacing the memory of his "little sweetheart" from his thoughts, and whenever the opportunity had presented itself he had hurried over to Bundoran in order to gladden himself with the sight of her winsome face.

How often, on such occasions, had they discussed the future together. And in all his talk it had always been "we," and never "I." It had never entered his head to ask her if she would be his wife, just as it had never entered hers to wonder whether he would marry her. They had both taken *that* for granted, and when he had accepted the appointment under the London syndicate, and had gone abroad, it had been a well-understood thing between them that when he returned he would claim her as his bride.

* * * * *

And now the dream was over! Mervyn was married—married to a Russian princess—and was even now on his way to Ireland. At all costs she must quit Bundoran before he arrived with the woman who had supplanted her.

"I am bound to go away in any case," she muttered to herself. "After what Mrs. Carew said to me this afternoon it is impossible for me to remain under this roof another night. Where shall I go? It must be somewhere where I am not known, somewhere where it will not be difficult for me to find employment."

"London!" she exclaimed. "The very place! No one will think of looking for me there. I will go to London!"

She had a few pounds in her pocket and a couple of bank-notes in her writing-case. She had also several articles of jewellery which had been given to her at various times by her adopted parents; and these, together with a handbag containing some sleeping apparel and toilet requisites, were all she decided to take with her. To have encumbered herself with luggage would have necessitated a car, and this would have been fatal to the object she had most at heart, which was to slip away without attracting attention and without leaving any clue by which she could afterwards be traced.

Whilst she was changing her afternoon dress for a less conspicious travelling costume she was disturbed by a knock at the bedroom door.

"Who's there?" she called.

"It is I," replied the voice of Mrs. Carew. "I wish to have a few words with you. I have something important to communicate.

Nora made no reply, nor did she open the door, and after a pause Mrs. Carew exclaimed:

"If you choose to be sulky it is no concern of mine, but I thought you would like to know that I have just heard from the new rector that Mervyn Blake is married and is expected at the Castle to-morrow!"

Still Nora vouchsafed no answer, and a few seconds later she had the satisfaction of hearing her stepmother go downstairs again.

It was now nearly five o'clock. The last train from Bundoran left at thirteen minutes past, and as the station was half-a-mile away, she decided it was time she was going. Having drawn down her veil, so as to conceal her face, she cautiously unlocked the bedroom door and stole downstairs. Mrs. Carew was entertaining a visitor in the drawing-room whilst the servants were engaged in the back of the house, and by slipping into the dining-room and stepping through the French window she managed to gain the road without attracting observation.

Upon reaching the station she took a ticket for Clones, and ten minutes later she found herself alone in a third-class compartment with the familiar objects of her girlhood's days receding into the distance as the train bore her swiftly away.

She tried not to think of Mervyn Blake, and with the object of diverting her thoughts from him she took up a paper which someone had left on the carriage seat. It was a low-class Society paper, published in London, and the first paragraph that caught her was this:

"Let no one say that the modern son is ungrateful! A week ago that titled dypsomaniac, Lord F——, was in the unhappy position of not being able to raise the price of a drink by reason of the fact that his ancestral acres were mortgaged up to the hilt. Fortunately for his lordship, he not only possessed an unquenchable thirst, but also an obliging son, and the latter has nobly come to the rescue by marrying a Russian Princess whose fortune is variously estimated at from six to eight million roubles. As soon as this fact became known to the Jews, the value of Lord F——'s time-honoured signature went up by leaps and bounds, and to-day he is the happiest, and probably the most intoxicated, peer in the United Kingdom!"

She flung the paper from her as though it had been a venomous reptile. It seemed as if the Fates had decreed that her misery should dog her wherever she went. She strove to dismiss the paragraph from her mind, but its brutal phrases haunted her, and by the time she reached Clones she was well-nigh spent by the mental struggles through which she had passed.

After a sleepless night at one of the hotels, she resumed her journey next morning, and arrived in Dublin at a quarter to eleven. As it was impossible for her to leave for England until evening, she determined to employ the interval in selling some of her jewellery, and for this purpose she made her way to a jeweller's shop in Grafton Street.

"You purchase second-hand jewellery, I believe?" she said to the attendant who came forward to serve her.

"Yes, madam," he replied. "Have you some to dispose of?"

"I have a few things here I should like to sell," she answered, opening her bag; but he hastened to explain that he was not empowered to deal with such matters himself.

"You will have to see Mr. Dillon," he said, referring to the proprietor of the shop. "He is engaged at present with some customers in his private room, but I don't think he will be long."

He had scarcely spoken ere the door of the inner room opened and Mr. Dillon came out.

"Reach me that set of opal studs and sleeve-links out of the window," he said to his assistant.

While the assistant was complying with this request Nora carelessly glanced through the half-open door of the inner room, and to her unspeakable dismay she perceived that the "customers" were Mervyn Blake and a handsome young lady of foreign appearance.

"I don't think I would like to give my husband opals, Mr. Dillon," she said, speaking with a pretty foreign accent. "They are unlucky, you know! Show me some diamond studs instead."

"Certainly, your highness," replied the proprietor;

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and a few moments later he disappeared into the room again with the articles for which she had asked.

"That's the Princess Olga Dianovitch," began the assistant, addressing Nora, and then he paused, alarmed by the ghastly whiteness of her face.

"Are you ill, madam?" he asked.

"I—I am not very well," stammered Nora. "I—I think I will call later, when Mr. Dillon is disengaged," and picking up her bag, she groped her way to the door and staggered out into the busy street.

CHAPTER III.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

"THERE, that will do for to-day, thank you, Miss Bryce."

The speaker was a Royal Academician, and the "model" was—Nora Carew!

Upon reaching London she had found that her dreams of speedy employment were doomed to be rudely dispelled. She had answered dozens of advertisements and

"Enough," she cried. "I forbid you to drag Mr. Blake's name into the discussion."

had tramped some scores of miles, but the result had always been the same, and she had crept back to her dingy lodgings broken-hearted and dispirited. Little by little her slender store of money had melted away, and at last, in sheer despair, she had taken her landlady's oft-repeated advice and had sought employment as an artist's model.

Her faultless figure and her sweet, sad face—beautiful still, in spite of the famished expression which it now habitually wore—secured her an immediate engagement; but the pay was miserably poor, and on the day of which we write she had not yet broken her fast although it was then six o'clock in the evening.

"I shall want you again to-morrow," said her patron. "I should also like you to come a little earlier if you can manage it—but perhaps your other engagements will not permit of this."

"I have no other engagements," she answered sadly. "I can come as early as you wish."

"Then please be here by nine o'clock," he said. "I will arrange with my wife to give you some dinner in the middle of the day."

She thanked him and took her departure. As she closed the studio door behind her she was horrified to find herself face to face with Adrian Meredith, who was evidently coming to pay his fellow artist a visit. She tried to slip past him before he recognised her, but the Fates were against her, and with a low cry of exultant surprise he darted after her and caught her by the arm.

"So I have found you at last, little runaway!" he said.

"Let me go!" she panted, struggling to free herself from his grasp. "Why do you seek to detain me? Let me go!"

"I won't force myself upon you," he said in injured tones. "I had hoped that my constancy would have secured me a kindlier reception at your hands, but it seems I was mistaken. I, only, of all your former friends, have made any attempt to discover your whereabouts. And now that I have found you, you spurn me as though I were your bitterest foe!"

He turned away his head as if to hide his emotion, and something suspiciously like a sob burst from his lips. It was only a clever piece of acting, but it served his purpose, and Nora at once became contrite and self-reproachful.

"I am sorry I spoke harshly to you, Mr. Meredith," she said, timidly laying her hand on his arm. "I did not mean to hurt your feelings. Will you forgive me?"

"Forgive you! There is nothing to forgive!" he answered, with a wistful smile. "You are the queen of my heart, and the queen, you know, can do no wrong. But enough of that. We are friends now, aren't we?"

She nodded her head, and then she held out her hand for the purpose of bidding him adieu.

He took her hand, but instead of letting it go again he drew it through his arm and commenced to walk down the road.

"This is not a time for conventional scruples," he said. "Anyone with half an eye can see that you are starving and I am going to insist upon you accepting my invitation to dinner!"

"Oh no——!" she began.

"Oh yes!" he interrupted firmly. "I am going to take you to the Criterion Restaurant and I'm not going to ask you a single question, or try to exact a single promise from you, until you have dined! After that, if you choose to confide your troubles to me I shall be proud to receive your confidences, but if you prefer to leave me in ignorance of what you have been doing, or where you are living, I shall make no attempt to find out. In a word, it shall depend entirely upon yourself whether we meet again or whether we part to-night for ever."

Again he was only acting—for he had not the slightest intention of losing sight of her now that he had found her; but again Nora was deceived into believing him, and her eyes brimmed over with grateful tears.

"Well, is it agreed that we go to the Criterion?" asked Meredith.

"I am reluctant to accept your invitation lest I should seem to be encouraging hopes which can never be realized," she replied.

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"That is unkind," he answered, gravely. "I am not a saint, but I trust I am too much of a gentleman to try to take advantage of your misfortune in order to press my suit upon you Have I not told you that if it is your desire that we should never meet again after to-night I will respect your wishes?"

"Then I will go," she said.

They managed to secure a table exactly opposite the main entrance, and a few minutes later Nora was enjoying the first decent meal she had tasted for over a month.

Under the influence of the unaccustomed food and the grateful warmth and light, she forgot her troubles and chatted to her companion with somewhat of her old animation and girlish abandon. But her forgetfulness was destined to be of short duration, for whilst she was in the very act of laughing at one of Meredith's sallies she suddenly caught sight of a well-known figure in the doorway, and the laugh died away in a gasp of stupefaction.

It was the figure of Mervyn Blake! If, as Meredith had said, he had been leading a life of luxury and gaiety, his face strangely belied the fact; for it was haggard and drawn, and his eyes had the hopeless look of a man who had drunk the cup of sorrow to its bitterest dregs.

He glanced wearily round the crowded room in search of a vacant place, and all at once his gaze encountered that of Nora.

A joyous light leapt into his eyes, the careworn look rolled from his face like a mist before the rising sun and he took a couple of eager strides toward her.

Then, for the first time, he perceived the figure of Adrian Meredith.

He reeled as though he had been struck. For one brief instant he regarded Nora and her companion with a stare of horrified incredulity, and then, with stifled groan, he turned on his heel and hurried away.

CHAPTER IV.

A HOMELESS WANDERER.

"THAT was an awkward *contretemps*, wasn't it?" remarked Meredith.

"He certainly seemed to find the situation rather embarrassing," she admitted.

"Oh, I wasn't looking at the matter from his point of view, but from yours!" he said.

"From mine?" she echoed with unaffected surprise. "In what way was the meeting awkward for me?"

"If you don't realize its awkwardness for yourself it is difficult for me to explain." he replied "Look at it in this light: A young lady, very beautiful, but very poor, runs away from home. For three months nothing whatever is heard of her, and then one of her former friends walks into a first-class London restaurant and sees her enjoying a *tête-à-tête* dinner in company with——"

He paused, for he saw that he had succeeded in making her understand, and he was too much of an artist to spoil his work by over-elaboration.

As for Nora, she was speechless with horror and indignation—horror for the false position into which her innocence had led her, and indignation against the man who had lured her into it.

"Of course you will have to marry me now!" said Meredith. "It is the only course that is open to you."

She made no reply. Indeed it is doubtful if she heard him, for her thoughts were absorbed in trying to devise some method of escaping from his hateful presence without creating a scene.

But her mind was in too chaotic a state to allow her to think calmly, and at last, in obedience to a sudden, reckless impulse, she started to her feet and walked quickly towards the door.

Quick as thought Meredith snatched up his hat and followed her, but before he had taken a dozen steps he was confronted by the waiter, who politely reminded him of the fact that he had omitted to pay for his dinner.

"It's all right, my good fellow!" said Meredith. "I only want to have a word with that lady before she goes, and then I'll come back and pay up."

The waiter smiled a pitying smile! He evidently thought that Meredith and Nora had arranged this little scene in order to escape without payment, and he muttered something under his breath to the effect that the "dodge was too thin!"

"Bother you, here's a sovereign!" said Meredith savagely. "You can give me the change when I come back," and he darted through the door through which Nora had already disappeared.

In the meantime Nora had made good use of the brief start she had obtained. As soon as she was safely outside the restaurant she broke into a run, doubled round the corner of the Haymarket, and never slackened pace until she reached Trafalgar Square. Still walking rapidly, she traversed the whole length of Whitehall, crossed over Westminster Bridge, turned to the right behind the hospital, and finally entered a dingy-looking house in one of the squalid streets that lie between the Albert Embankment and the Kennington Road.

This was to her "home," if it be not a degradation of the sacred word to apply it to the single dark and comfortless room for which she paid rent. At any rate it was the only home she possessed, though she was not fated to possess it long; for scarcely had she entered ere the landlady—a sour-faced, hard-featured woman—came into the room in a state of wrathful indignation.

"You're a nice 'un, I do think," was her greeting. "What d'ye mean by getting me into trouble with the police, and me wanting a furnit's rent and working myself to a shadder to keep you in luxury and idleness."

"What do you mean?" demanded Nora. "What has happened?"

"What has happened?" bawled the woman. "Why a private detective has been here inquiring for you, and he's coming back at eight o'clock! What have you been and gone and done?"

"I have done nothing, of course," said Nora haughtily.

"Gammon!" said the woman.

"I assure you you are altogether mistaken in supposing that I have committed any breach of the law," said Nora. "I think I can explain what has happened. One of my principal objects in coming to London was to escape from the persecutions of a gentleman who wished me to be his wife. He has been moving Heaven and earth to find out where I am living, and I can only suppose that the detective who called here this afternoon is one of those he has employed to trace me. By the merest chance I met the gentleman of whom I have spoken, this evening; but I managed to give him the slip, and I hurried here, thinking that I should be safe from further molestation. As one of his spies has discovered my address, this house is no longer safe for me, and consequently I shall go away at once before the detective returns."

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"A bootiful story!" she said; "I don't say but wot there ain't some people who wouldn't believe it; but, bless you, I believes it, and so long as you pays up wot you owes——"

"But you know I have no money," said Nora.

"No money!" said the woman. "Then give me that ring to pawn, and I'll bring you the change," and she pointed to a simple gold ring, set with a single pearl, that adorned the third finger of Nora's right hand.

"But that—that—is the ring that was given to me by the man to whom I was engaged," said Nora piteously. "Don't force me to part with *that*."

"All right, please yourself, my dear!" said the landlady coolly. "But you ain't a-going to leave this house till you've paid wot you owe—and the detective will be back in twenty minutes!"

"Here—take it!" she said with a choking sob. "Bring me the change as quickly as you can, and in the meantime I will pack up my things."

The woman hurried away and Nora immediately set to work to collect her scanty belongings. Ten minutes sufficed for this and by that time the landlady had returned.

"I couldn't squeeze more'n seven-and-six out of 'em!" she said. "Here's your change, three-and-six. Will you have a cup of tea afore you go?"

"No, thank you," said Nora, picking up her little bag, which contained all her earthly possessions, turning out into the cold world once more—a homeless, friendless wanderer!

* * * * *

Ten minutes after she had gone the detective announced his arrival by a vigorous rat-a-tat.

"Well, has Miss Bryce returned?" he asked.

"Lawks, yes—hours ago!" said the landlady.

"That's all right," he said pleasantly. "Will you kindly inform her that I wish to see her?"

"Sorry I can't oblige you!" she answered. "'Cos she's gone!"

"Gone!" he thundered, striding forward and seizing her roughly by the arm. "What do you mean, woman?"

"I means wot I says!" she replied. "She paid up like a lady, so 'ow was I to stop her a-doing as she pleased?"

"Where has she gone?" he demanded.

"Arsk me another!" she said.

"You wretch, you've done me out of a reward of five hundred pounds!" he exclaimed in savage accents. "If you'd only kept her until I came, I would have given you ten for yourself.

"She's the heiress to a fortune of over £200,000, and the lawyers have offered a reward of five hundred to anyone who discovers her whereabouts. I've been at work on the case for over six months, and just when I looked like pulling it off, you've gone and upset the apple-cart by helping her to escape!" and he stalked away leaving her staring after him in dumfounded amazement.

CHAPTER V.

MEREDITH'S DUPLICITY.

SIX weeks after the events recorded in our last chapter a curious scene might have been witnessed in Adrian Meredith's bachelor apartments in St. John's Wood.

The actors were Meredith himself and a Jew named Levi, and the subject under discussion was the repayment of certain large sums of money which the latter had lent the artist on the security of various bills and promissory notes.

"Give me another week," said Meredith, "and by that time I shall be in a position to pay you every farthing I owe."

"Not another day!" said the Jew.

"I'm afraid you'll have to!" said Meredith.

"Ve'll see apout that!" said Levi grimly. "Dose names on the pack of dose pills are——"

"Forgeries!" said Meredith.

"Forgeries?" screamed the Jew.

"Every one of them!" said Meredith coolly. "I couldn't persuade any of my friends to affix their signatures to my bills, so I affixed them myself. In other words, those bills you hold in your hand aren't worth the paper they're written on, and you can't possibly recover a penny of the money you've lent me."

"Put I can send you to prison, my fine shentleman!" said Levi.

"Of course you can," said Meredith. "I don't doubt but that if you were to prosecute me for forgery and obtaining money by false pretences, you would get me sent to penal servitude for fifteen or twenty years. But what good would that do? It would be deucedly inconvenient for me, I admit, but it wouldn't benefit you to the extent of a single penny! If, on the other hand, you leave me alone for another week you will get back every stiver I have borrowed."

"You haf said that before!" retorted Levi. "Ven you vent to Ireland six months ago you said that you were going to marry a young lady of fortune and that everything would pe settled as soon as you came pack."

"And I honestly believed it!" answered Meredith. "The marriage was unavoidably postponed, however, but it's going to take place within the next few days."

"If I thought that vot you said vas true I vould vait a little longer," said the Jew. "Put how am I to know that you ain't fooling me? You haf talked a lot apout this marriage, put you haf never even told me the young lady's name."

"Well I don't mind telling you now, on the condition that you keep it a strict secret," said Meredith. "She's the only daughter of the late Sir Rupert Glynn."

"And who vas he?" asked Levi, shrewdly.

"He was nobody in particular at the time of his death," replied Meredith, "but twenty years or more ago he was governor of Newfoundland. Shortly before his appointment to that exalted position he married one of the Duke of Gloucester's daughters, and he took her out with him to Newfoundland, where she gave birth to a daughter, and died almost immediately afterwards.

"When the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester heard of Lady Glynn's death, they begged Sir Rupert to send his orphan child to them in order that they might undertake the responsibility of her bringing-up. To this proposal Sir Rupert gladly agreed, and the infant was accordingly sent to England in charge of a trusted nurse; but the vessel in which they sailed was lost at sea, and neither of them was ever afterwards heard of.

"Six or seven months ago Sir Rupert died, leaving a fortune approaching a quarter of a million. Though it was morally certain that his daughter was dead, the lawyers were compelled to advertise for her before proceeding to distribute his estate, and by the merest chance I happened to see one of their advertisements, which contained, amongst other things, a minute des-

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cription of a peculiar silver chain which the child was wearing when she left Newfoundland.

"As soon as I read the advertisement I remembered that I had seen that very chain! I couldn't remember where at first, but it presently came back to me that it had been shown to me by the wife of an Irish clergyman who had told me that it belonged to her adopted daughter, who had been washed ashore during a storm about nineteen years ago! You can guess what I did; I hurried over to Ireland and, finding that the girl was utterly ignorant of her good fortune, I proceeded to make violent love to her!

"In the meantime the girl's adopted parents had died, leaving her in charge of a stepmother who treated her so badly that she ran away from home before I had time to pop the question! Three months later I came across her in London, found that she still supposed herself to be a penniless orphan, and was about to renew my suit when she once more disappeared.

"To-day, however, I have received information from one of my agents that she is in the East end of London. I am going to see her, and in less than a week both she and her fortune will be mine, for, of course, I shall see that everything is settled on me at the time of the marriage.

"And now you know exactly how the matter stands," he said. "The question you have to decide, therefore, is whether you will ruin all my plans and forfeit all chance of getting your money, or whether you will give me another week's grace and trust to my common sense to avoid a scandal by paying you the money as soon as I have netted my victim."

Levi decided that he would adopt the latter course, and took his departure. Meredith was disturbed by a knock at the door, and in answer to his impatient "Come in!" there entered — Mervyn Blake!

She flung the paper from her as though it had been a venomous reptile.

"Where is Miss Carew?" he demanded abruptly.

"I haven't the slightest idea!" said Meredith coolly. "How should *I* know where she is?"

"How should *you* know?" said Mervyn. "Pray, who is so likely to know as you, who lured her away from home by means of promises which——"

"I beg your pardon!" interrupted Meredith. "I had nothing whatever to do with her leaving home. On the contrary, I suspect *you* had more to do with her hasty departure than I."

"That is nonsense!" said Mervyn curtly. "How could I be the cause of her running away?"

"Well, I can suppose that she heard and believed the false report that you had married the Princess Olga, and she did not wish to stop in Bundoran and see another woman taking the place she had hoped would be hers!"

"Good Heavens! Do you mean what you say?" cried Mervyn in an agonized voice, for he was not aware that Nora had ever heard of his reported marriage, and this explanation of her disappearance came upon him like a thunderbolt.

"Have you any grounds for suggesting that that is why she ran away?" he asked in choking accents. "Has she ever told you so?"

"Oh dear no!" said Meredith. "She has never mentioned your name to me, nor I to her. In fact, I have only seen her once since she left home, and that was on the evening when you saw us at the Cri. I came across her quite by accident and, finding that she was starving, I insisted on standing her a dinner. It was simply an act of charity, and I have never seen her or heard of her since. Indeed, to tell you the truth, Miss Carew has never crossed my thoughts until you mentioned her name just now!"

Mervyn gazed at him in silence for a second or two, and then he held out his hand.

"I owe you an apology, Mr. Meredith," he said in a husky voice. "I have evidently been labouring under a monstrous delusion. I thought that you had induced Nora to run away with you, and I came here this morning with the intention of urging you to act towards her in an honourable and straightforward manner. Thank Heaven my suspicions have proved to be unfounded, and I beg you to accept my sincere apology for the injustice I have done you."

"Say no more, my dear fellow!" said Meredith. "I can quite understand that appearances were against me, but I trust I have now convinced you that I was as innocent of any complicity in Miss Carew's disappearance as I am of any knowledge of her present whereabouts! Will you stay and have lunch with me?"

"No, thank you," said Mervyn sadly. "I must set to work at once to discover where my poor unfortunate darling is hiding in order that I may hasten to her and clear up the grievous misunderstanding which has parted us. Did she tell you where she was living when you met her?"

"I believe she did," said Meredith. "It was somewhere Hampstead way, I think, but I really forget the exact address. If I happen to remember it I will drop you a line. Where are you staying?"

Mervyn gave him the name of his hotel, and they parted.

CHAPTER VI.

The Darkest Hour.

In a long, low attic in a miserable house in Houndsditch three hollow-cheeked women sat sewing. The eldest of these women was the widow of a one-time prosperous solicitor; the second had once been a popular favourite on the music-hall stage; the third was Nora Carew!

In the eyes of the law they were the "lodgers" of the Russian Jew, who rented the house and for whom they

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worked; but to all intents and purposes they were his slaves. He gave them employment on condition that they lodged at his house, and the scale of payment was so arranged that no matter how hard they worked they could never, by any chance, earn as much money in one week as would pay for one week's board and lodging!

The result of this ingenious arrangement was that when once an unfortunate creature got into his clutches it was utterly impossible for her to ever extricate herself, and she was compelled to go on working for him, and getting deeper and deeper into his debt, until death or disease released her from her bondage.

The attic was not only the workroom of Nora and her two companions, but was also their living-room and bedroom!

As a rule, they worked in gloomy silence; but on the afternoon of which we write Nora's bitterness and despair had reduced her to that stage when she felt that she must either talk or go mad.

"I won't do any more work until Mr. Figorski provides us with a stove," she exclaimed; "my fingers are so numb with cold that I can scarcely hold the needle. If I stay here much longer I shall become a raving lunatic," she continued. "I wish to Heaven I had died before I set foot in this horrible place."

"You may well say that," said the solicitor's widow. "The woman that was here before you, dropped down dead at her work, and as I watched them carry her out of the house I positively envied her."

"And this is England, the Home of the Free!" said Nora bitterly. "From pulpit and platform the doctrine is preached and the boast is made that the British flag cannot shelter a slave, and here, in the very heart of the Empire, are slaves compared with whom the West Indian niggers were pampered idlers!"

Neither of her companions in misfortune made any reply to this impassioned speech, and she was just about to burst out into another torrent of invective when she heard Figorski's foots eps on the creaking stairs.

"There's a gentleman wishes to see you downstairs," said the Russian, thrusting his head in at the door and addressing Nora.

"To see me," she cried, "to see me, Mr. Figorski?"

"That's what I said," he answered curtly.

"The gentleman who wishes to see you would not tell me his name," he said. "He would only say that he had come to take you away if you were willing to go. I pointed out to him that you owed me for three weeks' board and lodging, and that if you left without notice I should require to be liberally compensated for the loss of your services," and pointing to a door at the foot of the stairs he continued:

"Your visitor is in there. He has asked me to allow him to have a few words with you in private before we discuss the question of terms."

She descended the remaining stairs, opened the door of the room he had indicated—and found herself face to face with Adrian Meredith.

"Here you are at last!" he exclaimed, when she entered the room, and almost before she knew what was happening he had caught her in his arms and was smothering her with kisses.

"My poor darling, how changed you are!" he continued. "Why did you run away from me—why did you spurn my offer of assistance?"

She tried to answer him, but her heart was too full for words, and burying her face in her hands, she burst into a flood of tears.

"There, there! There is nothing to cry about now, little woman," he said soothingly. "From this moment your sorrows are at an end. As soon as I have settled with your rascally employer I'm going to take you to a jolly little furnished flat in South Kensington, and I'm going to leave you there in charge of a maid I have engaged until I have procured a license and arranged for our wedding. We will be married the day after to-morrow—which is the earliest date the law will allow—and then——"

"Oh, hush!" she cried. "Why will you force me to give you pain at the very moment when my only desire is to show you how grateful I am for all your kindness? You know that I can never marry you!"

"And why not?" he asked.

"Do not ask me," she pleaded.

"But I must!" he insisted.

"Then I cannot marry you because I do not love you," she answered. "You will probably despise me for the confession I am about to make, but I feel it is my duty to be perfectly frank with you, and therefore I will not attempt to disguise the fact that I have given all the love of which I am capable to another man and although he has rejected it, I have no love left for anyone else."

"But surely your pride should prevent you bestowing your love on a man who has behaved with such heartless cruelty as Mervyn Blake," he suggested.

"It should," she admitted. "But my love is stronger than my pride, and although I have tried to efface the memory of Mervyn Blake from my thoughts I have never succeeded, and I never shall."

"Ah, well, *I* will teach you to forget him!" he replied. "You may not love me now, but in the days to come your heart will turn to mine as naturally as the sunflower turns to the sun!"

"Then you will wait a little while," she asked eagerly, but he shook his head.

"Can't you see that what you ask is impossible?" he answered. "You have already discovered, at the cost of bitter suffering, that you cannot struggle on alone. Then what are you going to do when I take you away from here? Go back to Bundoran?"

"Never!" she declared emphatically.

"Very well; then what *are* you going to do? I am the only one amongst your friends who is willing to help you; but I am a single man, and you cannot come and live with me except as my wife.

"Do not misunderstand me," he added. "These are not my terms, but the world's. For my own part I would willingly devote my whole life to your service without exacting anything in return, but this, as I have tried to show you, the world will not allow."

"Then I must either consent to marry you or else make up my mind to remain in this horrible place for the rest of my life?" she asked.

"I am afraid so," he said gravely.

Anything was better than going back to slavery, and stretching out her arms towards Meredith, she cried:

"Oh, take me away! For pity's sake take me away!"

"Then you will marry me?" he asked.

"Yes, yes!" she sobbed. "I will do anything in the world if you will only take me away from this horrible house!"

He kissed her with affected tenderness, and then, having called Figorski into the room, he paid him what he demanded, and sent him for a hansom. Ten minutes later he and Nora drove away, with Figorski's good wishes for their future happiness ringing in their ears!

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CHAPTER VII.

Sunshine After Rain.

About half-an-hour after Nora's departure the detective who had traced her to her previous lodgings knocked at the door of Figorski's house.

"I believe you have a young lady living here who calls herself Miss Bryce?" he said to the Russian who opened the door,

"Then you'll believe anything," said Figorski, with a coarse laugh. "There's nobody of that name living here," and he made as though he would slam the door in the detective's face.

"Half-a-minute, please!" said the latter, placing his foot in the doorway. "Your denial is doubtless prompted by the fear that I want to get you into trouble, but I give you my word of honour that I don't. On the contrary, if you will allow me to have five minutes' conversation with the young lady, I will guarantee that you are well rewarded for your kindness."

"I tell you she isn't here!" said Figorski impatiently. "She went away half-an-hour ago."

"Snakes alive! then I'm too late again!" growled the detective. "That's twice I've missed her by the skin of my teeth! Have you any idea where she's gone?"

"The gentleman who took her away ordered the cabby to drive them to Brincliffe Mansions, South Kensington," said Figorski. "I think he's going to——"

But the detective waited to hear no more. A hansom was passing at the moment, and without further ado he hailed the driver, sprang into the vehicle, and drove away to Brincliffe Mansions.

He had some little difficulty in finding the particular flat which Meredith had rented, but at last he succeeded in his quest, and, taking out one of his professional cards, he wrote on the back, "I am the bearer of good news," and sent it up with a polite request for an interview.

Nora was alone when the card was handed to her, for Meredith, after seeing her into her new quarters, had left her in order to make arrangements for the wedding. Her first inclination was to refuse the detective admission, but upon reading the pencilled message on the back of his card, her curiosity overcame her reluctance, and she instructed the maid to show him up.

Having gained admittance to her presence the detective wasted no time in preliminaries, but in a few business-like phrases informed her that she was the daughter and heiress of the late Sir Rupert Glynn, and that a fortune of nearly a quarter of a million awaited her acceptance.

To say that she was dumfounded by his news is but feebly to describe her feelings!

At one bound she had passed from poverty to affluence, but the delight she would otherwise have experienced was marred by the thought that she had plighted her troth to Adrian Meredith.

"If only I had known this a couple of hours ago!" she muttered to herself in agitated tones. "It would be despicable to break my promise because I am no longer dependent on Mr. Meredith's generosity. He wooed me when I was destitute and friendless, and now that I am rich I must not—I dare not be guilty of the baseness of breaking my word."

"Are there any of your friends to whom you would like to communicate the news of your good fortune?" asked the detective, who was ignorant, of course, of the tempest that was raging in her mind.

"I know of no one who would be glad to hear of it," she answered bitterly.

"Well, I know of *one*, at any rate!" was his prompt retort. "Mr. Mervyn Blake has been moving Heaven and earth to discover your whereabouts, and only this morning he came to my office and wanted to engage me. I didn't tell him that I was hunting for you on my own account, but I promised that if I heard anything of you I would let him know. Now that I have earned the reward your lawyers have offered, I shall go straight to Mr. Blake's hotel and tell him where you are."

She had not the heart to forbid him, and three-quarters of an hour later Mervyn burst into the room in a state of the wildest excitement.

"So I have found you at last!" he cried, clasping her in his arms in spite of her feeble efforts to repulse him. "Oh, Nora, my darling, why did you run away? Is it possible that you credited that lying rumour that I was married to the Princess Olga Dianovitch? Mr. Meredith hinted as much to me, but I find it hard to believe that your faith in my love was so weak."

"Then wasn't it true?" she asked in a happy whisper.

"Of course it wasn't!" he replied indignantly. "That rascally father of mine inserted the announcement in the papers in order to hoodwink the money-lenders. He thought they would be willing to lend him more money if he made them believe that his son had married the daughter of a Russian millionaire, and some of them were foolish enough to swallow the bait."

"But why did you not answer my last letter?" she asked. "Why did you leave me for three months without any news of you?"

"That is also easily explained," he said. "Whilst I was in St. Petersburg I became acquainted with a certain Count Demidoff, and as he proved to be a charming young fellow we became fast friends. Unknown to me, Demidoff was a member of some secret society, and one night, whilst he and I were dining together, the police walked in and arrested us—him as a Nihilist and me as a supposed accomplice.

"We spent three months in prison and then we managed to escape, principally through the heroic exertions of Princess Olga Dianovitch, to whom Demidoff was engaged to be married. By helping us to escape, the Princess, of course, rendered herself liable to severe punishment, so she had to flee the country as well as we. She and Demidoff were married in Vienna, and then we all came over to Ireland, where they will remain until the storm has blown over."

"I saw you and the Princess in a jeweller's shop in Grafton Street," said Nora; and she told him when and how.

"You little goose!" he said, when she had narrated the circumstances. "She was choosing a wedding present for her husband, and I was merely helping her to choose it. When she spoke of her 'husband' it was to Demidoff she was referring, of course, and not to me!

"And now what are your plans for the future?" he asked in conclusion. "My visit to Russia has made me a comparatively rich man, and there is now no longer any reason why we should not be married at once. Shall the wedding take place in London here, or shall we go back to the Ould Counthry? I vote for Ould Oireland; what say you?"

"Oh, Mervyn!" she cried, with a little sob. "Why didn't you come to me before? I cannot marry you now. I have promised to marry Adrian Meredith!"

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"Marry Meredith!" he exclaimed, turning deathly white. "You can't mean that! Why, he told me only this morning that he hadn't the smallest particle of love for you, and that if ever he married it would be for money!"

This startling revelation made Nora strongly suspect that Meredith had known all along that she was Sir Rupert's daughter, and that that was why he had wooed

"Oh, Mervyn," she cried with a little sob. "Why didn't you come to me before? I cannot marry you now."

her with such stubborn perseverence. Before she had time to communicate her suspicions to Mervyn, however, the door was suddenly flung open, and Meredith himself burst into the room.

"I've got the license!" he began, and then, seeing Mervyn, he started back with an involuntary oath! He recovered composure with wonderful celerity, however, and advancing to Nora with an air of pretended agony he said:

"You are not going to throw me over at the eleventh hour are you, Nora?"

"That depends entirely upon yourself," she answered quietly. "Mr. Blake has just informed me that the paragraph you showed me announcing his marriage was false. I strongly suspect that you have known this for some time, yet you have allowed me to believe that it was true. I also suspect that you have heard some other news, of which Mr. Blake is still ignorant; but in spite of all this I am prepared to keep my promise to marry you if you still desire me to do so."

"Of course I do," he answered, joyously.

"Wait until I have finished, please!" she said coldly. "As I have just said, I will marry you in spite of all that has occurred if you insist upon my doing so, but before the wedding takes place I shall execute a deed bequeathing all I possess to the poor of Bundoran!"

"You can't mean what you say!" he gasped.

"Indeed I do!" she answered firmly, and with just a touch of contempt in her voice. "You have professed to love me for myself alone—now is your opportunity to prove your sincerity! What is your answer?"

He gazed at her with a look in which baffled rage and venomous spite struggled for the mastery. He tried to voice the fury that possessed him, but the words would not come, and after one or two convulsive twitchings of his livid face, he uttered a choking cry and fell prostrate across the rug.

They rushed to his assistance, but death had already marked him for his own, and a couple of hours later he died, without ever having recovered consciousness.

* * * * *

With the death of Adrian Meredith the last of the shadows that had darkened Nora's life passed away and henceforth all was sunshine.

Her claim to Sir Rupert's wealth was never disputed, and the first use she made of her newly-acquired fortune was to liberate the two unfortunate women who had been her fellow-slaves in Figorski's house.

Six weeks later she and Mervyn were married in Bundoran church, and the first to offer her congratulations to the blushing bride was—the Princess Olga Demidoff, née Dianovitch!

THE END.

HORRIBLE THREAT.—Mother (firmly to little daughter who is about to have a tooth drawn): "Now, May, if you cry I'll never take you to a dentist's again."

MRS. A.: "Are you troubled much in your neighbourhood with borrowing?" Mrs. B. (innocently): "Yes, a good deal. My neighbours don't seem to have anything I want."

BOY: "Pa, if I ask you an arithmetic question what I can answer right and you can't, will you give me a penny?" Pa: "Indeed, I will. What is it?" "How many postage stamps can I buy for four and twopence?" "Fifty." "Wrong. I can buy a hundred."

"WHY do you write under an assumed name, Mr. Scribe? You do so well that I should think you'd be proud to have your name identified with your work," asked the inquisitive young woman. "Well, the fact is, madam, I want posterity to say that I made my name for myself. The one I bear my parents gave me," explained Mr. Scribe, and the inquisitive young woman was satisfied.

OFF THE SCENT.—A certain shop-walker was noted for his severity to those under him. One day he approached a junior assistant whose counter a lady had just left. "You let that lady go out without making a purchase?" he asked severely. "Yes, sir, I——" "And she was at your counter fully ten minutes?" "Doubtless; but then you see——" "Exactly. I saw that, in spite of all the questions she put to you, you rarely answered her, and never attempted to get what she wanted." "Well, but——" "You need not make any excuse. I shall report you for your carelessness." "Well, I hadn't what she wanted." "What was that." "Six shillings! She's a book-canvasser." The shop-walker retired.

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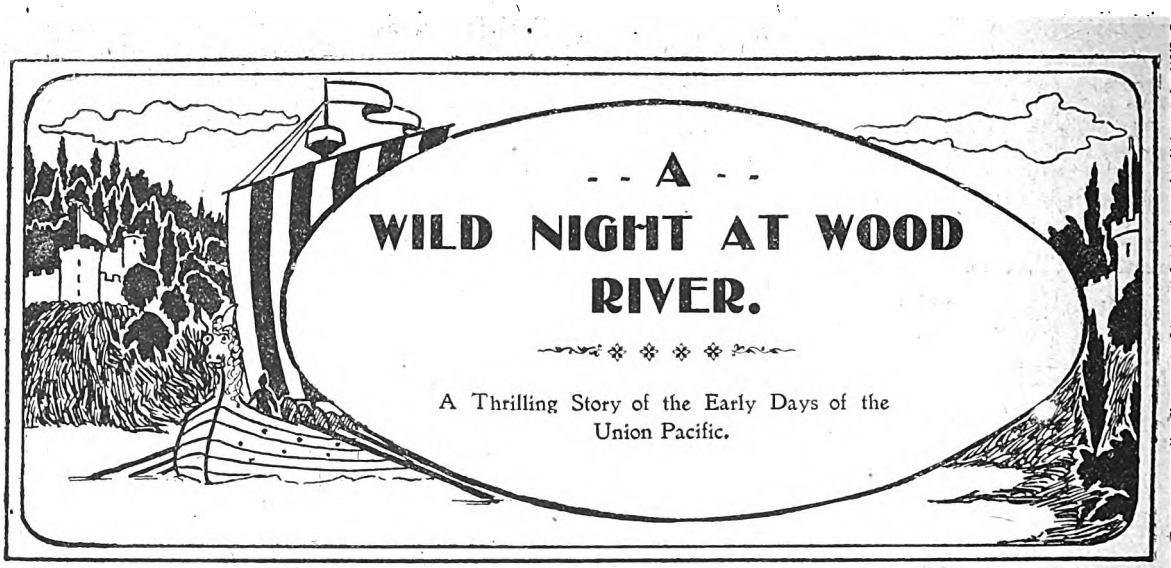

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WILD NIGHT AT WOOD RIVER.

A Thrilling Story of the Early Days of the Union Pacific.

"KEEP that kid quiet," said Bankers in a hoarse whisper.

"I'm doing the best I can," said his wife, trying to hush the little one, who was sobbing and moaning in her lap.

In the baby's milk waggon a bitter fight was going on between paregoric and pain, and the latter was dying hard. The wind drove the rain against the side of the car and made it rock to and fro.

"Emma," said Mrs. Bankers to her friend, "take that bottle and hold it between you and a crack in the car, and when it lightens drop ten drops into the spoon. I suppose we must not strike a light?"

"You bet you don't strike any light here unless you are ready to give up your chignon," said Bankers without taking his eyes from the crack through which he was peeping.

Emma took the bottle, and at each flash of lightning dropped a drop of hush medicine into the spoon, and when she had put in ten drops they gave it to the baby. That made twenty drops. It was dangerous, but it was sure death to all of them if the baby cried aloud.

The rain came in great sheets and with such force that it seemed that the car could hardly hold the rail. It was not a Pullman car, just a common red stock car standing on a siding, with a few armfuls of straw upon the floor.

Occasionally Bankers turned to glance at the two women who were crouching in one end of the car, and when the lightning lit up their faces they were fearful to behold. Now the rain, cold as sleet, came through the cracks in the car and stung the faces of those within.

Mrs. Bankers had seen three winters at Wood River, but her friend, the young woman who had come out to Western Nebraska to teach in a school, was in every sense a tenderfoot, and the experience of this wild night had almost driven her mad.

"There they are," whispered Bankers.

Now the women put their eyes to a crack, and when a flash came they could see a reef of feathered heads that formed a half-circle around the house, like a feather boa about a woman's neck.

Half the band dismounted and made a rush for the cottage. The door was broken, and the red devils swarmed in. One of them took a newspaper and lighted it at the open fireplace to make a torch, and by the light of it the little party in the stock car could see the Sioux running, half-crouching, from room to room in search of the occupants.

Finding the place deserted, and smarting under their disappointment, the Indians now set fire to the house, and by the light of it started to loot the railway-station less than a hundred yards away.

The station agent had been warned, as the others had been, by a Pawnee scout, but had bravely refused to leave his post. He had made no light, but sat in one end of the dark little room which served as ticket office, telegraph office, and sleeping room, and as the Indians approached opened fire.

At the very first shot the leader of the murderous band leapt high into the air, came down on his feet, leapt up again and again, and finally fell in a heap to rise no more. With a deafening yell the angry band made a rush for the door and began to beat against it with tomahawks, clubs, and guns.

Having emptied his rifle, the agent now took up a pair of 45-calibre revolvers, and the lead fairly rattled against the door, and no fewer than half-a-dozen savages sank to the platform, causing the besiegers to fall back a space. From a distance they began to pour the lead into the building; but the agent, crouching behind the little iron safe, was still unhurt.

An Indian brought a torch from the burning cottage and attempted to fire the station, but the rain and wind put out the fire. Two or three Sioux, noticing a string of cars upon the siding, began to search for stock or eatable freight. From car to car they ran, thrusting their rifles into the straw.

"Uh!" said an old buck as his rifle found something soft in one of the cars, and Bankers felt a hurt in his short ribs. Laying hold of the side of the car, the Indian began to pull and strain. By the merest chance he had taken hold of the car door, and now, as it opened, he thrust his hideous head inside.

Bankers could have blown the top of the Sioux's head off, but he knew that to fire would be to attract a dozen redskins, against whom he could not hope to hold out long.

The women scarcely breathed. The baby, full of

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paregoric, slept as though it had already entered upon its final rest.

The other two Indians had given up the search among the empty cars and gone back to the station, where the agent, having reloaded all his guns, kept the gang hopping and dancing about the station platform.

The old Sioux at the car door cocked his head and listened. He must have fancied he heard something breathe, for now he put his hands upon the sill and leapt into the car. He had scarcely straightened up when Bankers' rifle barrel fell across his feathered head, and he dropped like a leaf.

The schoolma'am uttered a faint scream, and that was the last sound that came from her corner for some time. The Sioux never moved a finger, and Bankers, having removed the warrior's fireams and ammunition, gave the gun to his wife and then covered the dead Sioux with straw.

Already the little frame cottage had burnt to the ground, and the rain had nearly quenched the fire. Every attempt made by the band to fire the station had ended in failure, and the Sioux were now preparing to storm the fort.

It was hard for Bankers to keep quiet in the car while the agent sold his life bravely and so dearly to the Sioux, but there were his wife and baby and the helpless schoolma'am, who had been persuaded by the Bankers to come to this wild region, and he felt it his duty to protect them as best he could.

Presently Bankers felt the stock car vibrate perceptibly, as though it were being rolled slowly along the rails. His first thought was that the Indians were pushing the empty cars down near the station, and that they would set fire to the straw, and then there would be no possible escape.

Now there was a roar as of an approaching train, and an instant later a great dark object hove in sight drawing a dozen box cars and running without a headlight. The shouts of the besiegers, the rattle of rifles, and the wild cry of the night prevented the Sioux from feeling the vibration or hearing the sound of the approaching train.

The agent, who had been severely wounded, now crawled to the key and called Ogallala. At the first attack he had wired for help, and now he told the operator there he could hold the place only a little while longer.

The agent was still at the key when the engine, rolling up to the station, shook the building, and he knew the moment he felt the quiver of it that help was at hand.

Instantly the doors of the box cars came open, and a company of government scouts, all Pawnees except the officers, leapt to the ground. The Sioux were making their last desperate charge upon the station. Before they could realize that reinforcements were at hand they were beset by the scouts, who always fought to kill. The battle was short and decisive, and when the Sioux fled they left more than half their number upon the field.

Probably the most anxious man in the whole party was the conductor of the special train that had brought the scouts from Ogallala. He had ridden all the way on the locomotive, and the moment the train stopped he had leapt to the ground and gone through a shower of bullets to where the cottage which had been the home of the Bankers had stood. The sight of the house in ashes made him sick at heart, but there was still hope.

They might have taken refuge in the station, and, facing about, the fearless conductor fought his way to the door. By this time the Sioux were giving all their attention to the scouts, and the conductor forced his body through the shot-riddled door. The agent lay upon the floor in a pool of his own blood, but he was still alive.

"Where are they?" asked the conductor, glancing about the dark room.

"Among the stock cars, if they are still alive," was the reply which came in a faint whisper. "I saw them leaving the house at dusk. Go to them—I'm—I'm all right."

And the conductor, having placed the wounded man upon his bed, made for the stock cars.

"Bankers, where are you?" he called, and Bankers answered only two cars away.

Now the conductor lighted his white light and climbed into the car. The brave Mrs. Bankers greeted him with a smile that soon changed to tears, for in the light of the hand lamp she had seen her baby's face, and it looked like the face of a dead child.

"Emma," she called excitedly, but there was no answer.

"Is she dead?" cried the conductor, falling upon his knees and holding the light close to his sweetheart's face.

"No, you chump," said Bankers. "She only fainted when I killed this Sioux," and he gave the dead Indian a kick and rolled him out of the car.

"But the baby?" pleaded Mrs. Bankers.

"She's all right," said the husband. "Only a little too much paregoric." And so it proved.

"Here, Em," said Bankers, shaking the young woman, who was regaining consciousness, "brace up. You've got company."

"Are we all safe?" asked the schoolma'am, feeling for her back hair. "Oh, my dear, brave friend, you have saved us all."

"Yes," said Bankers, "I've been hiding here in the straw while the agent was being murdered."

"But you saved the women," said the conductor, who was overjoyed at finding all alive.

"Yes," said Bankers, "that's something after all."

And all this is not a dream. It is only a scrap of history of the early days of the Union Pacific. The brave station agent is an old man now, and one of his legs is shorter than the other—the one that was shot that night.

The baby, having recovered from her severe tussle with colic and paregoric, is now one of the most charming women in a western city.

The conductor of the soldier train is at the time of writing a general superintendent of a well known railway. The snows of forty winters have fallen upon his wife's hair. It is almost white, but her face is still young and handsome, and I remember that she blushed when telling this story to me and recalling the fact that she had fainted in a stock car on that wild night at Wood River.

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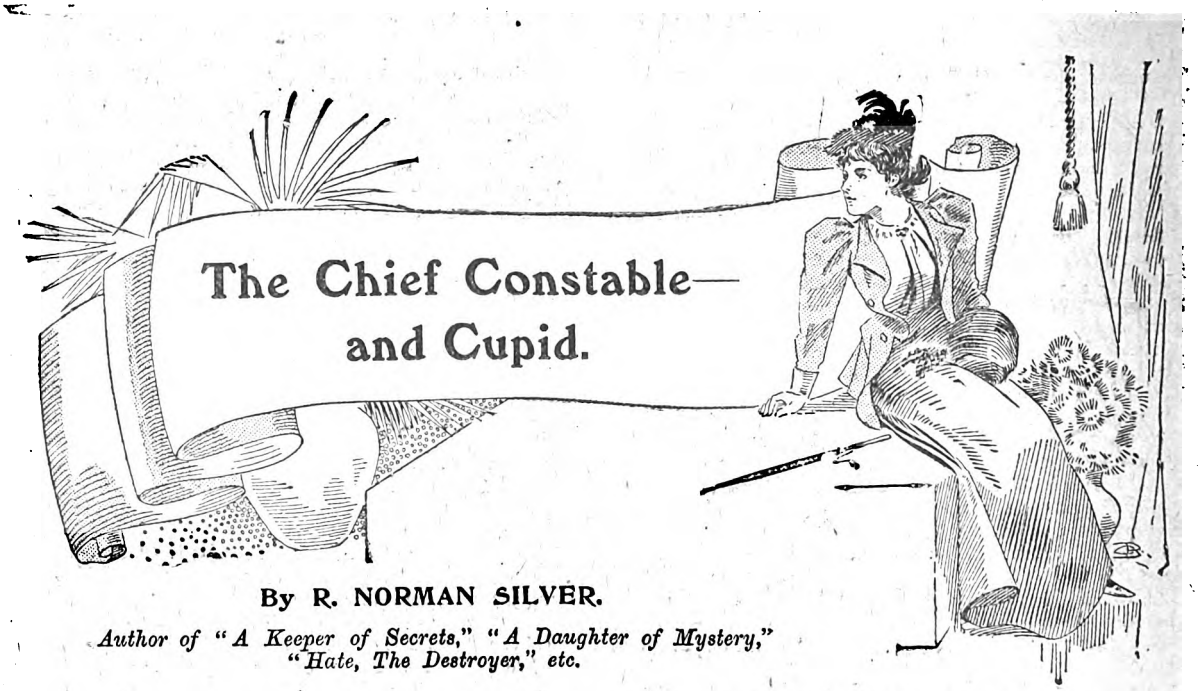

The Chief Constable—and Cupid.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "A Daughter of Mystery," "Hate, The Destroyer," etc.

I.

Captain Montague Chatteris, Chief Constable of Duchester, sat in his private room over the arched entrance of the grimy, stone fronted block which formed the central police offices of that thriving town.

Above the swarming streets and lanes of Duchester a spring night had unfolded its delicate veil; in house and shop, tramcar and hansom, the lights of Duchester jewelled the soft May evening.

The chief constable was running rapidly through a little heap of reports, indorsing them with marks of criticism or of approval. The glow of the green-shaded electrical lamp upon his desk showed a stalwart figure and a keen, good tempered face.

Captain Chatteris was no longer a young man, and yet he by no means deserved the description "middle-aged." In his loose tweed "mufti," he might have furnished a perfect illustration of that much misused phrase—the prime of life.

His task was interrupted by the entrance of a clerk—a typical policeman in plain clothes. A card laid deferentially near the chief constable's elbow explained his errand.

Montague Chatteris glanced at it, then threw down his pen and sprang up.

"Show her in immediately," he instructed.

The clerk returned to the door, opened it and stepped on one side.

A lady passed him into the shadowy apartment, moving with rustling haste and cheerful feminine confidence. She wore a trailing evening gown, all black lace and sequins, and a handsome cloak covered her white shoulders. Her features were still fresh and vigorous, though the piled tresses of her stylish coiffure were silvered by years and experience. She held out her hand to the chief constable.

"My dear Montague!" she said, warmly; "well, here I am, doing my best to look the part of fairy godmother."

Captain Chatteris bowed over the soft fingers that had lingered sympathetically in his. As the door closed he put his visitor into a seat and stood beside her.

"I am wondering, Mrs. Arnison," he began, almost nervously; "what you are thinking of me."

The other laughed merrily.

"Admiring you, my dear Montague," she retorted; "there, I always knew you'd do something romantic and unlikely—it's terrible business to be thirty-nine and a bachelor. Come, tell me about her; I'm to see her in a few moments, remember."

The chief constable twisted his long moustache in an embarrassed fashion.

"She—she is a schoolmistress," he said bluntly; "a head-mistress, though sadly too young for it. I—I met her when driving home one tempestuous evening. You know the open road between Duchester and Linacre; her school is at Linacre, and she walks three miles every morning and afternoon. Poor child, she was without an umbrella and in a fair way to be drowned outright. Of course, I took her up and drove her back to Duchester in my gig."

"And fell in love with her on the journey," concluded Mrs. Arnison.

"N-no," stammered Montague Chatteris; "that finished it, no doubt, but I had noticed her before that."

"Just so," assented Mrs. Arnison; "and now as you want an evening's flirtation in comfort, you bring me back from London to go to this dull ball of his worship the Mayor, and chaperone Miss—Miss——"

"Miss Beatrice East," said the chief constable of Duchester, and flushed as he uttered the name.

Mrs. Arnison rose and put her finger-tips on his arm.

"Montague," she remarked gravely; "I was your mother's friend and I am yours. Look into your own heart and tell me, is it a whim or a passion? Pause before you answer. Recollect, Duchester society—such as it is—will probably snub her and pity you. I will not ask if Miss East is a lady and a good woman—I know you too well to question it. Ultimately you will live down any annoyance, but only if you have

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Mrs. Arnison rose and put her finger tips on his arm.

love to help you. Can you assure me that you have?"

Montague Chatteris turned his proud head away.

"I did not believe," he answered huskily, "that I could love—until I met Beatrice East."

Mrs. Arnison sighed as she resumed her seat; she felt the throb in the words.

"And Miss East herself," she queried, "are you certain of her?"

A gleam of anxiety came into the chief constable's eyes.

"Mrs. Arnison," he said frankly, "I wish I could say yes without qualification or demur. Ask me if she loves me, and I can swear it—ask me if she is happy in that love and I dare not reply. She seems to—to fear me."

"She fears for you," corrected his adviser; "I like her the better, because she is sufficiently unselfish—women are only unselfish when they love. But perhaps I can help you; at all events, if you will let me, I will try. Get Miss East to give up her position and come to me in London. The season is going to be a brilliant one—I will promise she shall enjoy herself thoroughly for six weeks, then you shall marry and bring her back to Duchester under my wing. We will see if Duchester society cares to quarrel with me."

Captain Chatteris looked down undecidedly.

"Beatrice is very proud," he said, "she may not consent. But if she will I shall be only too happy, Mrs. Arnison. Indeed, you spoke the truth when you offered to play the part of a fairy god-mother."

Mrs. Arnison was not listening to these sentences of gratitude She sat trifling with her fan, apparently lost in thought. When she roused herself it was to put a significant inquiry.

"Montague," she demanded, "has Miss East any relatives?"

The chief constable knitted his brows.

"Her mother is dead," he responded; "she seems reluctant to talk of her other relations. I—I have not pressed her. Mrs. Arnison"—he stooped over the stately person in his easy-chair—"don't think me a romantic fool when I say that I trust her blindly, unreservedly. Why should I insult her by absurd investigations into her respectability"

"Montague!" said Mrs. Arnison, gravely, "I am an old woman and your friend and therefore privileged. Forgive me, then, if I urge you to remember that there is no truer test of love than confidence. If Miss East withholds one you have the right to ask if she has given the other."

Montague Chatteris winced and would have answered. But the words died on his lips as the clerk entered once more.

"A lady to see you, sir," he explained, "her name is Miss East and she says she has an appointment. I told her you were engaged, sir, but she asked me to say she was here."

The chief constable glanced apologetically at his guest and hastened into the outer office. The clerk held the door open as he returned, showing in a slight and feminine figure, in sweeping eau de nil silk. The hood of her pink opera-cloak was thrown over her head; so closely, she might have been desirous of escaping some unwelcome scrutiny.

Finding herself alone with Mrs. Arnison and Captain Chatteris, she pushed it back and the former saw a sensitive brunette countenance, with soft black hair, wide, dark eyes and features as delicate as those of a cameo.

It was at the face of Beatrice East rather than at Mrs. Arnison that the chief constable looked as he introduced them, a little nervously.

"I am very glad to know you, Miss East," said the elder woman, cordially; "I owe you an apology for delaying my return from London to this unconscionable hour. I am afraid I must have inconvenienced you sadly."

"Indeed, indeed, no," rejoined Beatrice East, colouring; "it is I who must have inconvenienced you. I am very sorry, but Captain Chatteris——"

"Told you I wouldn't miss either you or the Mayor's ball for worlds," interpolated Mrs. Arnison, cheerfully, "and he did quite right. And now, as time is flying and my carriage is blocking up the courtyard below, I think I shall have to hurry you, my good people. Why, my dear Montague, you're not dressed yet."

The chief constable laughed.

"That must not delay you," he said, "I have one or two matters to attend to before leaving."

Beatrice East turned to him anxiously.

"Oh!" she cried, "you—are you not coming?"

Mrs. Arnison smiled—the tone was so eager and child-like; there could be no doubt that Miss East was in love with Captain Montague Chatteris. The next moment the girl had shrunk into herself, as if abashed.

Captain Chatteris glanced at his watch.

"In half-an-hour at the latest," he promised, "I have only to interview a detective who has rather a singular case in hand. Meanwhile, let me pilot you through the corridors of this melancholy hole."

He drew the door wide for them to pass out. As he escorted them through the wide office beyond his private apartment, they met a bluff, square-shouldered man in civilian costume. The constable nodded to him.

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"You might step into my room, inspector," he said, "I want to see you before I go."

The inspector paused to salute. Suddenly he caught sight of the figure in the pale green silk, his eyes travelled up it to the dark handsome face. Beatrice East turned sharply away, raised an arm to her silken ho d and tremblingly lifted it over her pretty head. Then the little party moved on down the stone lobby. But the inspector stood, as though at attention, gazing after the three. Then with a puzzled gesture of a broad brown palm, he went into the chief constable's private room.

The girl held up to him a folded strip of paper.

Soon he heard the sound of the Captain's step as his superior returned.

"Ah, Potts," remarked the chief constable; "here you are. I'm afra'd I can't spare you very much time, but still, I wanted to hear your news. The Superintendent told me you had found a clue or something very like it."

Inspector Potts coughed.

"It's a moral certainty, sir," he said slowly, fidgeting with a heavily-shodden foot upon the worn carpet; "but only a moral one. I'm afraid we shall have to make a raid to get evidence. You see, they put me on a difficult case and then it's a matter of instinct and 'straws show which way the wind blows.' But the stipendiary has a very bad opinion of my 'straws,' sir, and if we go to a justice for a warrant it's like advertising it in the papers."

"Well," rejoined Montague Chatteris, good-humouredly, for the inspector was a privileged person, "let me know what your 'straws' are, Potts, and I will see what can be done."

Potts came closer to his chief and dropped his voice to a whisper.

"It's Flash Mat's lot, sir," he explained, with conscious importance. "That's what put me on to it. It was a regular puzzle to me before—half-a-dozen smart criminals in a town such as Duchester and not a thing against them for three months. I suspected it meant a head-centre of some sort had been planted here and they were anxious not to draw our attention to it. When I saw Mat I was certain."

"Flash Mat," murmured the chief constable; "he was in that forged bill affair five or six years ago."

"And got put away for four years," said Potts; "now, he's back at his o'd games again—the smartest swell criminal in the country. He's staying at the Grand, sir, and as thick as peas with some of the best in Duchester. Why, he's to be at the Mayor's ball to-night."

Montague Chatteris laughed.

"The bold villain," he commented, half-admiringly. "But what is he doing down here?"

"Having a quarterly settlement with the gang," said Inspector Potts, wrathfully; "that is, if my instinct isn't wrong, sir. And who do you think is in Duchester, too—old Josh the schoolmaster, Josh East his real name is. Josh is the most beautiful forger and false coiner in Europe and the old fox has never once been nabbed. Once, in Birmingham, I thought I had him, but he slipped through my fingers. But mark my words, sir, if Flash Mat and Josh the schoolmaster are in the same town there's business between them."

Montague Chatteris was not listening, he was knitting his brows absently. He seemed as if he were pursuing the answer to some simple calculation, the solution of which persistently escaped him. The inspector watched him intently. Presently the chief constable spoke.

"Why do you call this Josh East 'Josh the schoolmaster'?" he asked, and bent to poke the dwindling fire.

"Because he was once a schoolmaster," answered Potts calmly, "a very clever man is Master Josh—East."

Something in the pronounciation of the last name arrested the chief constable's attention. He flung down the poker and faced about.

"When I knew him in Birmingham, five years ago," went on Inspector Potts, deliberately, "he had a couple of pretty daughters, one nearly a woman, the other only a child. One was called Tessa, short for Esther, the other Trixy, short for Beatrice."

The speaker met, quietly and unwaveringly, the eye of Captain Chatteris.

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"The younger of the two ladies that went out of this room ten minutes ago," he said steadily, "was Trixy East."

Montague Chatteris raised a hand and passed it across his forehead, quiveringly. Inspector Potts stiffened himself, and changing his tone to one of crisp formality, completed his statement.

"I've spotted the place where the gang works," he pursued, "that is," he added with native caution, "if all is as I suspect. And if you approve, sir, a raid might give us the whole lot of them, plant and all."

The chief constable turned to his desk and began to finger the blue paper reports.

"You are right," Potts, he said, sternly, "make what arrangements you choose."

The inspector waited to receive any further instructions.

None being vouchsafed, he saluted and made as if to go. As he reached the door Montague Chatteris spoke again, slowly and drily.

"See that there is no unneccessary scandal," he commanded, "in the case of any innocent—persons."

Inspector Potts saluted once more, and with a pitying glance at the drooping figure of his superior, took his departure.

The chief constable sank into his chair and laid his head on his arms; once, his shoulders heaved and his strong frame shook.

Suddenly the clock on the mantel began to chime—Chatteris counted the strokes; it was the hour after ten. He rose and began to dress.

Twenty minutes later he was crossing the principal street of Duchester on his way to the town-hall.

II.

"PLEASE, sir, are you Captain Chatteris?"

The chief constable paused before the pillared portico of the Town-hall. Beside him stood a young girl, still in her teens—to judge by the loose locks that fell upon her coquettish shoulders—and of a quaint, though undeniable beauty.

She was well, if simply dressed, and not in the least embarrassed. To Montague Chatteris her face seemed vaguely familiar.

"Yes, little one," he answered, kindly "that is my name. What can I do for you, my child?"

The girl held up to him a folded strip of paper.

"Please, I was to ask you to read it at once," she added.

Chatteris complied with the request.

The opened sheet proved to contain a single perplexing sentence:

"If Captain Chatteris wishes to do Beatrice East the service of a life-time he will accompany the bearer, immediately and alone."

The chief constable gazed at the words, bewildered and uncomprehending. He glanced from the note to the countenance of the little person who had given it to him. She bore an unmistakable resemblance to Beatrice East—could she be the sister Tessa of whom Inspector Potts had spoken? Into what bizarre entanglement had Fate and Cupid led him? An officer of Justice, no less than, he trusted, a gentleman.

"This letter is not in Miss East's handwriting," he said guardedly, "and Miss East herself is waiting for me a few yards away. So, before I do what the paper asks. I will consult Miss East herself."

The messenger shook her picturesque head.

"I'll wait till you've been in if you like," she told him, "but you won't see Trixy all the same. Run along and make sure—only be quick."

Astonished beyond measure at this unceremonious style of address, the chief constable acted on the suggestion and strode through the decorated hall-way into the ball-room. Mrs. Arnison saw his tall figure and came hastily to meet him.

"I have some unexpected news for you," she said nervously; "word was sent to Miss East that her—her father had met with an accident and wished to see her. I gathered that the worst was feared. She left at once, poor girl."

Montague Chatteris tried to collect his thoughts. If Potts had told him the truth, Beatrice East was the daughter of an expert forger, a brilliant scoundrel none the less a criminal because he had contrived to elude the clutches of the Law. To what evil haunts might she not have bent her steps at his command? The criminal seldom dies in an odour of respectability.

The chief constable murmured a few reassuring phrases in Mrs. Arnison's ear, and hurriedly retraced the route to the portico. On the edge of the shadow flung from the temporary awning that spanned the pavement, the girl who had given him the mysterious note was standing.

Chatteris joined her and walked a trifle further into the gloom that flanked the Town-hall block. Here he halted and would have put a question, but his companion snapped her fingers loudly and a hansom, appearing suddenly from the dusk, drew to the kerb. The girl moved towards it.

The chief constable hesitated. Then he reflected that he was Beatrice East's accepted lover, that against her he knew nothing, and that he held in his hand a summons to her side. The man in him conquered the official, he jumped into the cab. His companion following, they were borne off at a gallop.

Contrary to Chatteris' anticipation, the driver did not seek the lower quarter of the town—he made for the broad road that led to the open country, through a solitary and decaying suburb. Some fifteen minutes hard going—during which the captain sought vainly to converse with his guide—brought them to a detached villa, at the end of a grass-grown street. In front of the villa the thoroughfare stopped, at the skirt of a broken meadow destined for building-lots that had found no purchasers.

Apparently the driver of the hansom had been satisfied beforehand, for he turned his horse's head without waiting for his fare.

A curious emotion flitted over Montague Chatteris as he heard the iron-shod hoofs die away on the macadam. The loneliness of the place seemed eerie—there were no lights at any of the visible windows of the villa, and only one rusty gas-standard to twenty yards of side-walk.

His guide ran up the steps of the dark house and knocked—peculiarly; then motioned to the chief constable to enter. He complied with the request, and gained an unilluminated lobby; the girl passed down it, and opened a door—through which there poured a flood of radiance. Chatteris followed and passed in, blinking. Someone slipped between him and the exit. The next instant he had perceived that the room was tenanted by half-a-dozen men of various ages. Of Beatrice East there was no sign.

A tall and sinister fellow in evening-dress lounged forward. "Welcome, Captain," he said mockingly, "gentlemen, this is the Chief Constable of Duchester;

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Captain, a choice selection of blackguards, at your service."

There was a murmur of coarse amusement among the persons referred to.

"Come, Mat," put in an older and shorter man, in a rusty black frock coat, "to business. Captain Chatteris, you have been decoyed here for a very simple reason. We have grounds for knowing that your men have picked up our scent—we chose to act before they ran us down. Tessa, give the Captain a seat."

The girl who had guided the chief constable to this singular trap pushed a battered chair into the light of the hanging lamp that swung above the deal table at one side of the room. Chatteris strode to it mechanically and sat down. He noticed that the table was littered

As he stared at the nearing figures, he saw that the door by which he himself had entered began to open stealthily.

with an assortment of inks, graduated pens, delicate steel knives, and two or three bottles with ground-glass stoppers, such as are used for chemicals.

"You have two alternatives, Captain," went on the speaker, "and, even as a selection of blackguards, we are not so hardened as not to prefer, on our part, the pleasanter of the two. Either you will give us your promise to delay, for a fortnight, any action by your people, so that we may remove certain very valuable effects at our leisure, or you will write a few lines of affectionate farewell to your friends, and—disappear. I may add—permanently."

Montague Chatteris was wrestling with a score of conflicting emotions. But the dominant ones were love and wounded professional pride. The first clamoured for an explanation of Beatrice East's conduct, the other whispered hope and caution.

"Before I answer your—your ultimatum," he said, slowly, "I shall require to be told one thing. What share did Miss Beatrice East play in the comedy which has brought me here?"

The little, elderly man laughed—not ill-humouredly. "Oh," he replied, "Trixy's as innocent as the new born babe. We spotted your flirtation with her, twigged the invitation to join the dance, and sent Tessa, at the right moment, with a message that I was dying. Our plans were vague, according as you offered to play escort or not. Mat being at the ball, in pursuit of a predilection for the genteel, superintended matters, and finally brought Trixy along, while Tess waited with a note for you. But Trixy doesn't belong to our vulgar sphere, my dear Chief, so don't yearn for a cut throat and oblivion."

The person who had been addressed as Mat was chafing visibly. "I'll thank you to leave Trix out of this business, John East," he snarled; "there's been too much of her already."

The forger sneered, politely, "And I'll thank you not to interfere, Mat Foley," he said; "Tessa, ask Beatrice to come in."

Tessa stepped to another door than that by which she had ushered in the chief constable. Flinging it open she called to someone within. A moment later Beatrice East appeared on the threshold—seeing Chatteris she hid her face in her hands.

"Perhaps," remarked John East, chuckling, "you would like a short conversation with my daughter, Captai —it may serve to remind you that you are still young and that life is sweet."

"Curse you, Josh, I'll not stand this!" cried Mat, fiercely, but the forger pushed him back with a strong hand, and the rest of the little gang of reprobates grinned. Beatrice was crossing, with faltering feet, to Chatteris' side.

"Don't—" she murmured, with a convulsive sob—"Don't hate me. Oh, I shall die if they harm you. Why did we ever meet!"

Montague Chatteris caught the fainting figure in his arms. "I know you are innocent, dearest," he answered in the same fashion; "but do you bid me lose my honour? Even a chief constable has his standard of honour—he is one of the soldiers of civilization."

"Then I have killed you," moaned Beatrice; "if only I had never come to Duchester. It was to be near Tessa—mother begged me not to abandon her. Why did I not tell you all? I would have done, only I was afraid of losing you. I love you so. And Mat will not let them spare you—he has always told me I should marry no one but him."

The voice of Joshua East interrupted them.

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"Now, Captain," he said, "time's up; is it to be life and love or death and——"

At the unfinished sentence Beatrice East flung up her hands and swooned.

Montague Chatteris set her in the seat by the table, feeling strangely weak and unmanned himself. As he bent to lay her back, his eye caught a label on one of the bottles that stood like islands among the litter. The label read "Sulphuric Acid."

In a flash he had snatched it up, whipped out the stopper and turned, holding aloft in a wide-mouthed vessel a pint of liquid blindness and agony.

"Keep away!" he cried, "the man who touches me will never see another dawn."

"A thousand furies," hissed the forger, casting his affectation of good temper from him, "he's got the sulphuric!"

The others of the gang had started forward at the Captain's sudden movement—at Joshua East's words they shrank from the chief constable appalled.

Matthew Foley whipped out a revolver; before he could cock it the forger had grasped and wrested it out of his clutch.

"No noise!" he commanded, coolly.

He slipped the weapon into his pocket and drew out a formidable dagger-knife—as he opened it, the blade gleamed in the rays of the lamp.

"You're a bigger man than I, Mat," he said, under his breath; "and besides, Trixy hates me quite enough already."

He motioned to the girl Tess, who came and stood fearlessly, her bright eyes glistening with interest and excitement. Her father tied a handkerchief over them.

"Obey orders, Tess," he said, "and fear nothing."

"Yes, dad," answered the girl, calmly.

"Put your hands behind your back," instructed the forger. Tess did as she was bidden. "Now take hold of her wrists, Mat," pursued Joshua East, with relentless generalship, "there, we'll see if I'm not a good judge of human nature. Remember, she's Trixy's sister, Captain."

Horrified, Chatteris perceived the plan that had so hastily been elaborated. Shielded behind Tessa, Mat Foley, guiding her by his grip upon her wrists, was stealing towards him, the gleaming dagger-knife poised in one clenched hand. Beatrice herself lay insensate where her lover had placed her. Fate was creeping pitilessly onwards in the likeness of a child—the one touch of humanity was the folded handkerchief which was to hide from her the last act in this brief drama. Chatteris dare not fling the acid, and not to fling it was death.

As he stared at the nearing figures he saw, across them, that the door by which he himself had entered began to open stealthily. No one else noticed it, the gang of criminals was lost in a horrible fascination. Chatteris' heart almost ceased to beat as a familiar face appeared in the widening crack. It was the face of Inspector Potts and he looked at that instant the most astounded man in Christendom. The next moment a small and ominous object showed itself in the aperture, there was an explosion, and Mat Foley, relinquishing his grasp of Tessa's arms, pitched over with a cry that was a mixture of shriek and howl. His right arm had been shattered by the bullet.

At the sound the room filled, as if by magic, with men in the uniform of the Duchester police. Montague Chatteris gasped once, and then with the blind instinct of genius, did the most brilliant thing he had ever done in his life.

"Seize those men, Inspector," he commanded, indicating with a dramatic gesture the minor members of the gang, "Joshua East, I charge you to surrender in the King's name."

The words died on his lips.

Joshua East, with a grim smile upon his withered countenance, had plucked from his pocket the revolver wrested so recently out of his colleague's hand, and had discharged it into his temple. For the last time he had evaded the redoubtable Inspector Potts. So far as he was concerned the inspector's otherwise fortunately-calculated raid had failed.

* * * * *

Three months afterwards the following paragraph appeared in the *Duchester Weekly Chronicle*:

> ON Wednesday, at the Church of St. James the Less, our gallant and popular Chief Constable espoused Miss Beatrice East, ward of Mrs. Philpot Arnison, of London and Duchester. The crowded edifice bore witness to the esteem which Duchester bears towards Captain Chatteris, whose brilliant exploit at the arrest of "Flash Mat's" gang of forgers is still fresh in our memories. The Captain entered by strategy the head-quarters of the gang and engaged them in conversation while the house was being invaded by the police. All Ducastrians will wish him and his beautiful young bride all possible felicity.

Elsewhere in the same intelligent journal might have been read the announcement:

> DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR POTTS has been unanimously appointed to be Deputy Chief Constable in place of Mr. Trackitt, resigned. Captain Chatteris paid a high tribute to the merits of the new Deputy Chief, in introducing the latter to the force.

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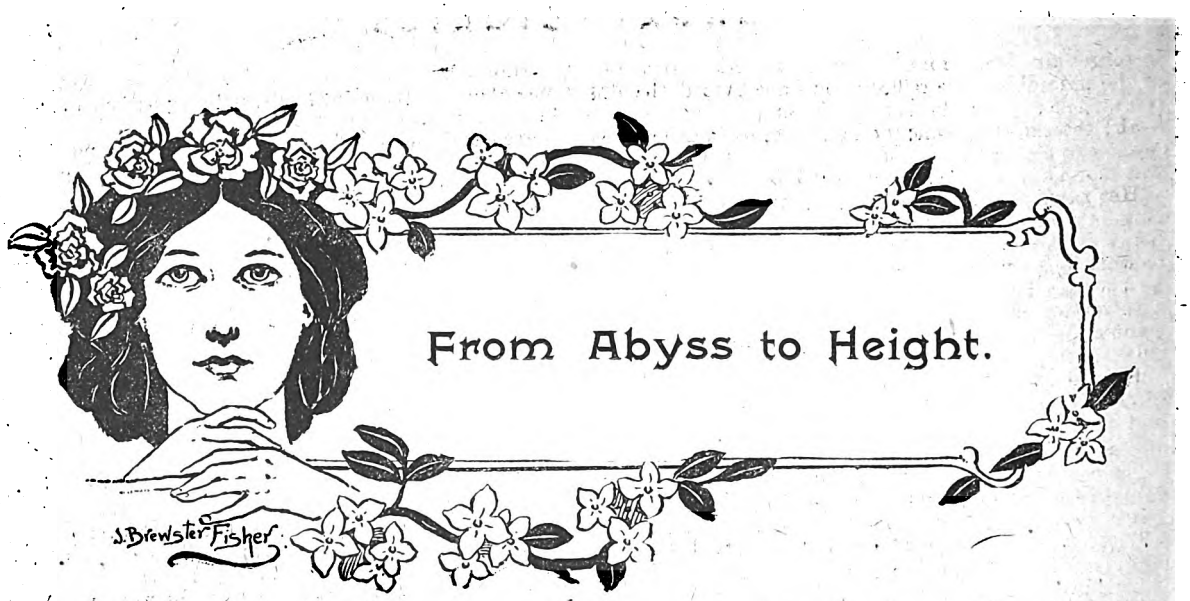

HAMILTON strolled aimlessly down the Strand. He held his head in almost a defiant perpendicularity, and there was a hard, forced smile on his face. Several times he bowed almost mechanically to passers-by and each of them wondered what had happened to Hamilton, that he should be so preoccupied.

The manager of a popular theatre that he passed, happy in the consciousness of a big night's receipts, graciously called to him after he had passed the door, and offered him an admission; and the manager was was much surprised when Hamilton declined it with punctilious courtesy, and walked on with all the dignity of a millionaire—for Hamilton seldom declined such an offer, and it was well-known that he was not a millionaire by any manner of means.

The fact of the matter was that Hamilton was decidedly at outs with the world. He knew that if he were to feel carefully in his pockets he would discover the practically insignificant sum of two-and-sixpence, more or less, and there was a frightful probability that it would prove less. He was also quite well aware, although he tried hard not to pay any attention to the fact, that this insignificant sum was all he possessed in the world.

Hamilton had recently been dropped from the reporting staff of the *Dawn*. There had been a general upheaval in the force (in every healthy newspaper office an upheaval occurs semi-annually or thereabouts) and it was always Hamilton's luck to be one of the upheaved ones.

He wasn't a bad newspaper man in his way. He was well educated, gentlemanly, and addicted to no vice in particular, and careful of his habits. But, as the editor had said of him, "There seemed to be nothing in him."

Newspaper men are divided into two classes—those who are rising in the profession and those who are declining. Few, indeed, are stationary. If there were any such, Hamilton was one of them.

But he was not recognised as being even stationary. Almost unconsciously he was put in the declining class. Occasionally his case would excite a little interest, and he would become the subject of a conversation between a sub editor and his chief, or between two of his own comrades, and they would try to discover just what the matter was with Hamilton; but they never arrived at a satisfactory conclusion.

Some said he was indifferent. Others said he was lazy. All agreed that he was a charming fellow; but if there was to be anyone discharged from the staff, Hamilton was sure to be the very first victim. He had been discharged in turn from every newspaper in town. Some of them had even been so kind as to take him back and discharge him again.

He took it all very calmly. Perhaps it was the fact that he could be discharged without making a scene that made him so often a victim. He never decried the justice of the case of the editor who discharged him. In fact, this was the very secret of Hamilton's ill success. He had absolutely no confidence in himself at all. A newspaper man without confidence is pretty nearly as useless as a fish without fins. And there was nothing in all Hamilton's experience to give him confidence. He had never been trusted with an important case. Consequently he had never accomplished anything. He did very well to copy off the entries in a precinct house register, or to discover the important arrivals at the hotels, but that was about all he could do.

For this very reason, when he was not enjoying a period of prosperity as a staff reporter, he found it next to impossible to get up anything in the shape of a special article, and when he did write a thing and submitted it to an editor, it was ten to one that the editor declined it without reading it, merely because it was "some stuff of Hamilton's."

Hamilton was the son of a rich man—or, at least, the son of a man who had been reputed rich. His early youth had been passed in idleness. He had gone to college, and afterwards had put in a year or more of idleness as a young man about town. Then his father died very suddenly, and the estate of the elder Hamilton was discovered to be bankrupt.

The son found himself thrown suddenly upon the world, with a few suits of clothes as his capital. He knew but one thing. He knew London. He knew it from Piccadilly to Fleet Street, and he knew it in the daytime and the dark. He knew how cold and heartless and selfish it was, and he could have calculated to an hour how long it would take his Society acquaintances

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to forget all about him. Given a particular *débutante* of the preceding season, he could have named the day when she would cut him in the street. There was one —ah! there is always one in a man's life—whom he would have sworn would be faithful to him to the end. She was married to another man within six months!

Her name was Helen Welling. She sent him back a ring one day, without a word of explanation, and he never saw her again. Soon afterwards, Hamilton went to work as a newspaper reporter. It was the only thing he thought he could do. To tell the truth, he didn't care very much whether he did that well or not. All he wanted from the world was some sort of a living, but this he found a very difficult thing to obtain.

He had spent eight years at the work, and he found himself in a worse state than he had been at first. He had no superfluous clothes now. He had pawned them all. He had pawned everything, from time to time, save a handsome ring, with the name "Helen" engraved inside, and he had promised himself that if he were ever forced to pawn that it would be to buy a revolver, with which to end his miserable life. And he secretly hoped that if that day ever came, she would learn what had become of the ring, and what he had done with the money raised on it.

As he walked on, Hamilton was railing at the world for perhaps the first time in his life, and considering whether he had better spend his money for something to eat that evening, or wait until the next morning. He was in awful luck. Everything had gone wrong. His manuscripts had all been rejected, and the one or two friends, who occasionally loaned him a little money when he was hard pushed, had begun to get so cool that he would have starved rather than ask them for another cent.

He decided in favour of putting off the meal until the following morning, though he had eaten nothing that day; for if he was to be able to do anything in the shape of work on the morrow he would need a meal more than he did now. So he cocked his head even more defiantly than ever, and tried very hard to look as though he had just finished a good dinner, washed down by champagne —for he was very sensitive about being pitied. He tried to whistle a gay tune; but, as he walked on, it had degenerated into the most doleful of funeral marches.

He himself had hardly noticed the change. When he did, he turned abruptly from the great artery of the metropolis and walked rapidly towards the east. He heaved a great sigh as he did so, and came as near crying as he ever did since he was a little boy in short trousers. It was ten o'clock at the earliest, and the street was almost empty.

He did not know why he was walking in this way on the half-deserted thoroughfare. He had no intention of going anywhere. It was merely that he did not care to go to his bare, uncomfortable, cold little room. He wanted to be away from anything that reminded him of his poverty. He wanted to be away from himself if he could but get away. He did not know just exactly how it happened—he did not even remember at what intersecting street, but he knew that he was awakened from his pre-occupation by a woman's shrill scream for help.

He ran forward almost mechanically. In the quiet street before him a man was struggling with a woman. A child was standing by, adding its still shriller voice to the outcry of the latter. A cab stood but a few feet away, and Hamilton noticed with disgust that the cabman sat calmly on his seat, watching the struggle, and apparently unwilling to go to the woman's rescue.

Hamilton had not the slightest idea what the trouble was about. He merely knew that a man was apparently trying to choke a woman, and he knew but one duty for a spectator under such circumstances. He ran forward the harder. He was not particularly strong, and he was weaker than usual after a twenty-four hours' fast; but he was brave, and not unskilful with his fists.

He was too late, however. The man saw him coming, and, apparently using strength that he had not at first considered necessary, he threw the woman heavily to the stone pavement, grabbed the child, sprang into a cab, and before Hamilton could collect his scattered ideas, was driving rapidly up the street.

Hamilton had not been a newspaper man for nothing. He knew the whole story at a glance. Husband and wife separated—troubled about the child—both parents claimed it—courts decided in favour of the mother—father resorted to abduction—and so forth. It was an old story. It was happening every day. Sometimes it was published in the paper and sometimes it was not, according to the degree of interest belonging to the previous history of the family and their social position.

Hamilton's impulse was to run to the woman and help her. His reason came to him in a minute, however, and he decided that it would be far better to attempt to follow the abductor. Already people were hurrying from the neighbouring houses, who would take care of the mother, while the cab with the abductor and the child was hurrying up the street. They were not going fast enough to attract the attention of the police. It was still possible to catch up with him if a cab could be secured.

Hamilton felt the two-and-sixpence jingling in his pocket, and his heart sank. He continued to follow the cab up the street, hoping against hope. He mentally anathematized the police, who seemed on this occasion to be one and all asleep. He found himself wishing that by some lucky accident Sullivan would turn up, looking for a fare.

Sullivan was an old cab driver, whom Hamilton had known in the old days, when he was a rich, young bachelor. He had taken a fancy to Sullivan, and the latter had driven him around the town, at all hours of the day and night, until he believed he must have paid him altogether a small fortune.

Even in the days of his waning prosperity he had always gone to the corner frequented by Sullivan, when for any reason he had needed a cab and thought he could afford one. Sullivan, he believed, would have trusted him.

He had been running only a short time, when he heard the cheering rattle of wheels, and presently a hansom hove in sight. Hamilton hailed it, without thinking of the expense and his poverty. It was not Sullivan's, but the cabman was, of course, only too anxious to get a fare, and a moment later, Hamilton, out of breath, was in hot pursuit. The cabby whipped up his horse, and went at the affair as though his heart were in it. Hamilton had discreetly forgotten to mention the amount of money he had in his pocket.

The chase proved to be no easy one, however. It took the occupant of the runaway cab but a few moments to discover that he was being pursued by another cab, and the race became exciting indeed.

In and out of the streets the two cabs turned, hardly varying the distance between them. They were gradually nearing Hyde Park. Hamilton hoped that the abductor would enter the park driveway. There were

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mounted policemen near there, and the race would be ended in a very few minutes.

But the abductor was no such fool. He turned down Grosvenor Place.

"Hopes to get out by way of Victoria," muttered Hamilton, with an exclamation of disgust.

He was almost beginning to fear that his man would get away after all, that he would fail in this adventure, just as he had failed in everything else, and would have but a big cab bill and possibly a lamed horse to pay for as his only souvenir of the case—when he perceived that at last he was gaining.

It took some time to halve the distance between them, but he did it. Now he could begin to see distinctly the form of the driver on the pursued cab as he stood up in his seat and bent over to lash his horse. They had turned into the Buckingham Palace Road. Hamilton stood up and shouted in his excitement. His heart leapt, for he saw that the driver was Sullivan himself.

"Sullivan!" shouted Hamilton.

The cabman turned round and looked at him.

"Sullivan!" he shouted again, "stop that cab, or I'll put you in the police-court!"

There was no mistaking the meaning of his words. There was no mistaking the fact that he could do what he had threatened, and it was quite possible that Sullivan recognised the voice of his pursuer. At any rate the cab in front stopped almost immediately, and Hamilton, flushed with the delicious excitement of success in at least one thing that he had attempted, ran forward and lifted from the cab the unconscious form of a little girl, who had been, to all appearances, slightly chloroformed.

As the cab stopped, the abductor had sprung from it and made his escape. Hamilton, still holding the little girl in his arms, looked at Sullivan in a manner that made the latter turn his eyes in shame to the ground.

"It's some divorce business, Mr. Hamilton," he said. "My fare was the little one's father, and he wanted the child. He said he had a right to it. I didn't mean to be mixed up in anything wrong. You know I wouldn't do anything wrong."

"Sullivan——" Hamilton began.

He was about to administer a lecture preliminary to a further investigation into Sullivan's conduct in the affair, when the little girl showed signs of returning consciousness. It would be far better, he knew, to put off the investigation until he had returned the child to her mother, so he told Sullivan curtly to call at his lodgings the following morning on pain of being reported to the police, and, still holding the child in his arms, got into a hansom and started back.

He rather liked the position in which he found himself now. Every man has something in his nature that makes him like to be considered a protector of the weak, and the way the child nestled up to him in the cab and clasped his arm, as though she had absolute confidence in his protection, was to Hamilton as delightful a thing as had happened to him in a long time. He found himself wondering how long it had been since he had held a child in his arms before, and found that it had been at least ten years. He felt proud of himself, and forgot all about his hunger and the limited amount of money in his pocket.

"You are not going to take me to papa, are you?" said the child.

"No," said Hamilton. "I'm going to take you to the police-station where they will take care of you till your mother comes for you."

"Oh, please don't," the child exclaimed, bursting unexpectedly into tears, "please don't—please don't."

Just how to get out of this interesting predicament Hamilton did not know. He knew that it was his duty to take the child to the police-station. But he also knew that she would be very much frightened, and he was beginning to feel that a police-station was no place for her.

He looked down at her great upturned eyes. He noted the rich dress in which she was clad, and the jewellery on her arms and about her throat. One of the little diamonds in her locket that hung from her necklace would have made him feel rich. He didn't care much, any way.

"All right," he said finally. "I'll promise not to take you to the police-station. Tell me what your name is."

"Oh, thank you, thank you," she said, "but I can't tell you what my name is."

"You can't?" he repeated amazed.

"No, mamma made me promise never to tell anyone. I don't know what my name is, and I don't know you."

Hamilton frowned a little. He rather felt that he had a right to know. The child was a little difficult, with her refusal to lose sight of her mother's command. Such instructions had undoubtedly been given her to prevent the very attempt that had been made that night to carry her off, however, and he couldn't help admiring the child's unquestioning obedience to her mother.

"Well," he said, "tell me where you live, and I'll take you straight home."

She bent her head a little in thought a moment, and frowned.

"I live in a long street near a big church—that is, mamma and I live there now. It's Grandpa's, you know, and we have just come to live with him. I don't know the name of the street. Mamma never lets me go out alone, you know."

Hamilton looked puzzled. The adventure was becoming more unusual every moment.

"Well," he said, "if you won't tell me your name, and can't tell me where you live, I'll have to take you to the police-station."

"But you promised not to," she cried with a shudder.

He looked into her great trusting eyes again. He could not disappoint such confidence as that.

"How do you expect to get back to your mother?" he asked, talking to her quite seriously, as he would have talked to a mature woman.

"Oh," she answered confidently, "mamma will come for me. She always told me that if I were taken away from her she would come for me as soon as she could."

"But," continued the distracted Hamilton, "how is she going to know where you are?"

"Oh! she'll find out some way or other," replied the little girl. "I'm sure she will."

He drove to his own home. He carried her in his arms to his own bare room, and he sat down on a chair and tried to think. It was almost ludicrous. The cabby was waiting below for his money. The child would need attention. He was a law breaker himself in not taking the child to the police, and he would have to break his pledged word to the child if he did.

He tried to think what to. She could not remain there with him, and there was no one to whom he could take her at that time of night.

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In the meantime she gazed at him quite contentedly from a seat on his bed. He was weak and very hungry. No doubt she was the same. He thought of the ring. Perhaps he might get enough on it to pay the cabby, get them something to eat, and still leave enough to buy what he had always intended to buy with the money it had brought.

He went to a worn old trunk, and after rummaging around in it, fished out at length a plush jewel case. He opened it, took out a ring, and placed it sighing on the table. The child reached over and picked it up.

"Oh! that is like mamma's ring," she exclaimed.

He looked at her a moment, and said, quickly:

"Tell me your name and I will give it to you."

She hesitated a moment.

It was a temptation—too great a temptation.

"Helen Brewer," she faltered.

"My Heaven!" exclaimed Hamilton.

He looked at her for a moment, and then he knew—he knew that the girl before him was the daughter of the woman he had once loved.

* * * * *

There was an air of suppressed excitement among the staff of the *Dawn* that night.

Every available newspaper man in town had been pressed into service, and every paper was bent on getting a beat on all the other papers in relation to a sensational abduction case that occurred but a few hours before under the very eyes of the police.

It was a matter concerning people of high social standing.

There had been an unfortunate marriage. The husband had been at fault, and the wife had obtained a divorce together with the custody of the child. The husband had threatened to steal the child, and after several failures had succeeded in doing so. All London was talking of the affair.

The father had made good his escape with the child, and no trace could be discovered of his whereabouts.

One o'clock had come and gone, and not a word had been learnt except the short story of the mother. The editor of the *Dawn* sat at his desk, tapping impatiently on it with his pencil.

Would his men ever come in with any news? Had any of the other newspapers found out something that he did not know? It might be worth his situation to be beaten.

He was excited and miserable when the door was quickly opened, and Hamilton, pale-faced and weary, entered.

"You haven't the slightest newspaper instinct in your make up, Hamilton," said the editor, snappishly. "We have a big case on hand, and if you had been round I could have given you something to do. Of course you were not. You come round when there is nothing to do, and loaf when there is something important. I don't understand you at all."

It is very probable that Hamilton did not hear a word that had been said, however, for he sank wearily into a chair, and said:

"I'm in a peck of trouble, Kendrick, and you must help me out of it."

"Humph," said Kendrick.

"I've got a child downstairs in a cab. She's the daughter of Mrs. Brewer—you know the one, used to be a Miss Welling, daughter of the rich Welling——"

The editor did not quite faint. He began breathing freely again.

Hamilton continued:

"There has been some trouble in the family—divorce, you know—and the father tried to steal the child. I rescued her from him. I want you to detail one man—please do—to take the child back to her mother. I can't do it. There used to be something between us, you know, in the old days, and I don't want her to know it was I. I've got a cabman down there to whom I owe at least a sovereign. You must lend me that much, or he'll have me arrested. I'm all broken up, Kendrick. Don't refuse—please don't!"

The editor had quite regained his speech. But he did not say much.

"You—you—of all men!"

That was as much as he could say at the time.

* * * * *

Hamilton did not rise till noon the next day. He had confused memories of the preceding night. There was something about a child in them, and something about the woman he loved.

It seemed to him that he had been told that he was again on the staff of the *Dawn*; and indeed that he might consider he had never been discharged, and might draw his back pay just as though he had been at work all the time.

He couldn't believe this was all true until he had put his hand into his pocket, and discovered there a generous roll of notes. He did remember eating a big supper, however, late in the night, at which, for some strange reason or other, he had been a good deal lionized.

But something that was given him while he was getting ready for breakfast brought back to him a vivid remembrance of all the events of the previous evening. It was a note in a woman's handwriting, and the significance of its contents may be gathered from their effect upon Hamilton.

For when he lifted his eyes from the written page, there gleamed in them a new and transfiguring brightness of hope—the hope of recovering a happiness that had been as dead to him for years.

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Author of "The Peril of the Prince," "Seaward for the Foe," "Guilty Gold," etc.

SUMMARY.

THE steamship *Trojan* is homeward bound from the Cape. On board is Michael Standridge, who is returning to England from the Kimberley diamond fields, in possession of the "Kimberley Elephant," the largest diamond found in the colony. On the ship is his half-brother, Simon Hoathley. On the way up the English Channel the latter steals into the miner's cabin with the intention of murdering him and obtaining possession of the diamond. The miner, however, is on the alert, and presents a pistol at the intruder's head.

Michael sells his diamond for £20,000 to Messrs. Strauss and Lightfoot, whose clerk, Swinley Tasker, he discovers in an attempt to rob him of £35. Michael reads Tasker a lecture, kicks him, and departs—having made an enemy of this rascal. Reading is where Michael expects to find news of his daughter, and he purchases Kennett's Cross, a dilapidated farmhouse in the neighbourhood, this house meeting his requirements by being very secluded, and on a clay soil suitable for brickmaking.

He spends his time in making bricks, and as each batch is made he draws out from the bank a thousand pounds in gold, until at length his balance is quite low. One day Michael is thrown out of his pony-trap, and enters a house for assistance. Here he finds Cuthbert Blakesley, the cashier at the bank, and two ladies, and recognises in the younger one, to whom Cuthbert is engaged to be married, a strong resemblance to his wife.

Mrs. Bonfield is able to prove that Marion is Michael's daughter, and he promises to acquaint her shortly with the secret of Kennett's Cross. A few weeks later Marion and Cuthbert are sitting in the garden, waiting for her father, when a constable enters and arrests Cuthbert on the charge of murdering Michael.

At the inquest which follows strong evidence against Cuthbert is given. The latter also makes a statement. The verdict is one of "Wilful murder against Cuthbert Blakesley."

In order to clear his name, Marion lives at Kennett's Cross, and consults Zambra, the famous detective. The latter makes some startling discoveries.

CHAPTER X. (*continued*).

"THAT was the germ from which sprang my first idea of the prisoner's innocence, when I knew absolutely nothing about him or about his surroundings, except that he was a bank cashier, and therefore presumably a man of average intelligence. Were he ever so morally capable of doing what he was charged with he would never have been such a fool to put forward such a defence. Well, going on from that thesis, I started in my mental argument with the cat story as an accepted truth, and my first task was to consider if the incident was merely a mad freak of chance, or whether if it had a deeper significance—a close relation to the tragedy of Friday night. Here, too, I was able to still more strongly fortify the case for Mr. Blakesly, which I was building up in my mind, actuated then, you will remember, by purely disinterested motives."

Zambra had been walking up and down the room, but here he paused in his walk and looked at Marion.

"You are a brave girl," he said kindly; "but do you think that you are strong enough to listen to my notion of the foul and treacherous means by which your father met his death? It is not description, remember—only theory—though I am very much out of my reckoning, if it does not turn out more than fancy."

"Go on, please," said Marion; "nothing can alter what has happened and we have to save the living."

Zambra resumed his walk, and proceeded:

"This, then, is what I imagine occurred. Some person or persons—from what I have seen since I came to this house I think there was only one implicated—knew of Mr. Standridge's supposed accumulation of gold coin in a strong room or vault of his own manufacture, and determined to take possession of it. Your father being, as I understand, a man of powerful physique, he (or they) could only hope to succeed by killing him first. But this was difficult, because of the precaution Mr. Standridge was known to take in safeguarding himself and his property. The criminal, therefore, devised a scheme of such devilish ingenuity that it would not only gain for him secret access to this house, but would cause an innocent man to be suspected as the literally red-handed perpetrator. I believe that Cuthbert Blakesly was brought to the place by means of a trick, and I believe that the kitten was purposely placed in a trap and in a lacerated condition at the garden gate, in order to serve the double end of getting the bloodstains upon Blakesly's clothes, and of allowing the murderer to slip into the house unseen.

"This is what I imagine happened. The criminal, who must have been listening outside this window during Blakesly's call, ascertained by that means when the latter was about to take his leave. Just as your father and Blakesly approached the front door he must have thrust the kitten which he had brought into the jaws of the steel trap, causing it to squeal. Placing it by the gate, he then retreated swiftly to the rear of the laurel bush close to the front door, and while Mr. Standridge and his visitor were down at the gate examining the wounded animal, slipped into the house. The rest was easy. Hiding behind the door, he stabbed your father in the back when he entered. The cat and the trap were, I believe, removed by the murderer to give the lie to the defence he knew would be made by Blakesly.

"You noticed that my first act on arrival was to look for signs, in support of my theory, at the corners of the house at one of which I had previously thought the murderer might have been concealed while the two were talking at the door. These signs I eventually found under the laurel bush, in such a position that they could not have been caused by the police-admitted tramplers at the inquest. The footmarks of some person who had pressed himself among the foliage of the tree, thereby breaking several twigs, were shown up in striking contrast by means of the shower which you have told me of. A few drops percolated through the leaves, and fell on the footmarks, showing

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that the latter were made *before* the rain came, whereas the tracks of the mob around are easily distinguishable as having been made by the *after* shower."

"You have done wonders, already, Mr. Zambra," said Marion, her eyes sparkling with excitement; "but there are two points which strike me as wanting explanation; the evidence of the analyst as to the *human* blood on the bell, and the knowledge evinced by the murderer about the position of the hidden key."

"Your questions show that you have a real grasp of the situation," said the detective, allowing himself to relax into a genial smile. "Would that I always had such clients. As to the blood spot on the bell, I do not attach so very much importance to it, as if my theory is correct, and I am able to prove a trick, that might easily have been part of it—in common language a 'plant.' I quite admit, though, that in the event of my failure to do this, the blood spot is likely to press hard on the prisoner. In the matter of the key and the missing money, I confess myself puzzled as yet, though it is quite possible that before I leave the house something may transpire to shed light on them.

"Next to what I call the 'cat story,' it was this hidden key, found apparently by the police untouched in its hiding-place, that convinced me of Mr Blakesly's innocence. Surely after commiting the double crime and effecting his purpose, he would never have taken the trouble to go upstairs and fasten the key down in the floor again. But then, this objection remains in the case of anyone else and yet, with the exception of Mr. Oakley and his cashier, no one had a chance of knowing where the key was. It is just possible there may have been a duplicate used, but I think not. Nobody but the maker of the door could have made a key to fit the lock, and with all their faults, the police would have discovered if that were so. I shall, of course, satisfy myself on the point independently."

Zambra paused, and coming to the table, took up the envelope. "If I am not greviously mistaken," he said, "the clue to the mystery lies hidden in this find of yours. *Prima facie* it is, of course, good evidence—that is, good police evidence—against Mr. Blakesly with that stain on it. But how did it come in the tobacco-jar? Suppose Blakesly were guilty, would he have taken the trouble to preserve such a damning witness against himself by placing it where it ought to have been found by the police? It is a mystery how it did come there, but I am very sure it was not put there by the prisoner. That being so, someone else must have been there that night, and it is that someone else I have to discover. Perhaps this envelope will lead to him."

"How can that be possible?" said Marion.

"Look at the envelope closely. Do you not see any peculiarities in it?"

"Nothing, but the stain."

Zambra smiled.

"That envelope," he said, "has been twice sent through the post—once as an inclosure to be reposted, and the second time when it was posted at Wilmington to Mr. Blakesly See the creased fold across the centre; and here, by the aid of the magnifying glass, I see the imprint of the office stamp which has gone through the inclosing envelope. There is no ink on it, of course, and it is far too indistinct to be legible, but there is the clue as to where this forgery—for it is a forgery—started from. It was posted by someone lying up in the neighbourhood, to be used in the scheme for getting Mr. Blakesly out here that night."

"But if the stamp is illegible how can it serve us?" exclaimed Marion.

"I shall photograph the envelope," said Zambra. "It is quite likely that what is hidden there will yield to the searchlight of the lens."

CHAPTER XI.

THE HIDDEN POSTMARK.

As Zambra spoke he stooped and picked up from the floor a small black bag which he had brought with him. This he placed on the table, and, quickly undoing the fastenings disclosed to Marion's interested gaze a neatly packed assortment of shining apparatus and coils of the finest wire. There were two or three miniature cameras, at the most three or four inches square, and furnished with tiny glittering lenses no bigger than a shilling; there was a small electric battery, with its jar charged and ready for use; quite a collection of glass-stoppered ounce bottles were stowed away in the quilted lining; while the odd corners were filled up with an *omnium gatherum* comprising pick-locks, skeleton keys, and even surgical instruments. In the centre of the bag was a camera slightly larger than the others, and capable of taking "quarter-plate" negatives, yet so constructed as to fold up into the smallest possible space.

It was this last apparatus that Zambra took from its receptacle, saying as he did so:

"This bag, you see, contains the little scientific specialities which have done so much good work for me. One like it ought to be the inseparable companion of every detective, but your official spy is far too bumptious an individual to prefer the boundless light of science to his own limited intelligence."

"It was with one of these that you cleared up the mystery of 'The Arab Javelin,' was it not?" said Marion. "It was through reading that case I thought of you."

"Yes, with one of those silent witnesses there," replied Zambra, pointing to the bag. "It is an automatic repeating camera which can be placed so as to record the secret actions of persons when they are quite alone, and when it is not possible to set human eyes to watch them. I may have to use it before this case is ended, but we must find our 'suspect' first. Perhaps this apparatus will show us where to look for him."

He had clamped the quarter-plate camera on to the back of a chair, and was pinning the envelope to the top rail of another chair, which he arranged so that the light from the window fell full upon it. This done, he placed the chair with the camera opposite and sharply focussed the envelope, upon which nothing was visible but the address, the cancelled postage stamp, and the Wilmington postmark. The stain and the Reading delivery postmark were on the reverse or flap side. Then he inserted a dark slide, and, removing the cap, gave an exposure of thirty seconds, after which he subjected the other side of the envelope to a precisely similar operation.

"And now if there is a roomy cupboard in the house which I can use as a dark room," said Zambra, "we shall soon know all that the camera can tell us. Any place without a window will do."

Marion conducted him to one of the dark store rooms behind the dairy, and, having complied with his request for some fresh water, left him to develop the films by the light of a portable ruby lamp. In about twenty minutes Zambra re-entered the sitting-room holding the finished films in his hands His brows were knit, and so entirely was he absorbed in the business of the moment that for the first time during his visit he forgot to be courteous. Disregarding Marion's inquiry he walked straight to the window, and with his magnifying glass subjected one of the negatives to a prolonged scrutiny. For a long time he stood there searching the transparent film—equally available as positive or negative first in one light, then in another, holding it at different distances, and twisting it this way and that. Suddenly he held it motionless, keeping the magnifier in the same position for quite a couple of minutes, while the abstracted look on his face gradually cleared to one of the keenest comprehension. Finally, with a smile that spoke of triumph, he turned apologetically to Marion.

"Forgive my pre-occupation," he said, "but it has been to some purpose. Kindly step here a moment and tell me what you make of this."

Zambra held the film and the magnifier while Marion looked. Her gaze being thus directed to the right spot, she had no difficulty in seeing that the lens had reproduced in

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a visible form inequalities in the paper which had been invisible in the envelope itself. Near the right hand edge, and close to the clear reproduction of the right Wilmington postmark, was a faint circle, inclosing certain letters which bore out Zambra's theory that the postmark of an outside envelope had left its inkless impression on the one sent to Cuthbert. But the letters themselves were more difficult to decipher.

"I can make out a W and an O, then there is a blank followed by a C and E and an S, then another short blank, and an E and an R. Is it possible that it is Worcester?" asked Marion.

"Good, so far as it goes," said Zambra, "but try again. Can you make nothing more of it?"

Again Marion concentrated her eyes on the shadowy film, with the result that a little further on she was able to distinguish the letters A R K, and in the centre of the circle a Y and figures 7 and 2, the latter evidently part of the date May 7th, 1892. Zambra agreed with her as to the date, but shook his head at her suggestion that the letters A R K referred to the number of the collection.

"The alphabetical sign of the collection would be over the date in the centre, I think I can see traces of it," he said. "But your reading confirms mine in every respect. The letters A R K are part of the name of the place. It is only because you have probably never heard of it that you are unable to supply the missing letters. The place where we have to look for a further clue to your father's murderer is Worcester Park, nowhere near the town of that name, but a suburban neighbourhood in Surrey, lying between Wimbledon and Cheam, and some twelve miles from Waterloo. It is quite a small place inhabited chiefly by clerks and others engaged in business in London."

"I cannot understand it," said Marion. "What connection can there be between a London suburb and my father? He only returned from the Cape last year after many years absence, and he settled here almost immediately. In the week during which I knew him he certainly never mentioned the name. It almost seems as if Uncle Simon were right, and that it was a London burglar who is guilty of my poor father's blood."

Zambra came and seated himself opposite Marion.

"This brings us to another stage in the inquiry," he said. "I gathered the general outlines of your rather romantic history from the newspapers, how your father only found you a week before his death, and how you had been brought up by a stranger; but can you tell me nothing more than that—not about your own, but about your father's past career, his family, and his curious adoption of another name? You see our only clue, so far as it goes, suggests that somewhere in this little suburban resort, Worcester Park, there is, or was, an individual so well acquainted with Mr. Standridge's handwriting that he was able to forge a letter from him and send it down to a confederate who must have been then resident at Reading—the other film plainly shows the Reading post-mark—to be used in the double plot against your father and Mr. Blakesly. It is absolutely essential that I should be able to review every possible combination in your father's life. I understand that you had no relative in these parts, but you mentioned an uncle just now. Could he help us in tracing out the past do you think?"

Marion produced the card inscribed with the address, "Morton, Delaval Rectory, Yorkshire," explaining that her uncle was to be in London for some time, and that letters sent to his home would not reach him at present.

Zambra copied the address into his pocket-book, and rather abruptly changed the subject by proposing that he should now look over the house, more especially the hole in the flooring where the key had been hidden, and lastly, the strong-room itself.

"In criminal investigation," he explained, "it is one of my maxims to approach the various details in the same order as that likely to have been observed by the guilty party. A detective ought to see eye to eye with his quarry, and by this method one has more chance of obtaining an identical point of view."

Marion conducted Zambra from room to room, and, as she did so, she could not help noticing how silent he had become now that he was embarked on the more practical part of his work. He asked no questions, but went about methodically examining every article and every nook and cranny, even to the extent of sounding walls and peering up chimneys. Thus quietly and thoroughly, but without incident, the search was conducted through the whole of the ground and first floor till they came to the chamber where the key had been hidden.

As for herself, Marion was obliged to confess complete ignorance except that her father had been separated from her mother who had long been dead. Briefly describing Uncle Simon's visit, and the reason for his staying the night, she expressed her doubts of his being of any use to the inquiry. He was a country clergyman in poor health, and he had not seen or heard of his brother since their boyhood till he read of the tragedy in a newspaper. She supposed, however, that he would be ready and able to speak of those early days.

Zambra listened with grave interest.

"I saw the gentleman in the lane this morning," he said musingly, adding, with apparent irrelevance. "You have been too busy to dust your mantelpiece this morning, I think, Miss Standridge?"

Marion, wondering, admitted that such was the case.

"Pray don't apologize," continued Zambra. "This dust is highly interesting, and tells me that your uncle applied himself during the night just nine times to a pint flask which he kept on the mantelpiece; but that by the way. It is well you have given me his address, in case I want to communicate with him, though, from what you say, his information is not likely to be valuable."

At first sight there was nothing in the room to divert attention from the yawning hole and the plank lying beside it, and Zambra was making his way to this point when, with a short exclamation, he threw himself on his knees, and, taking out a penknife, carefully removed a small round speck from the floor. The substance he transferred to an empty pill-box, which he placed in his pocket still without comment. Humouring his mood, Marion forbore to question him, and stood looking on in silence while he turned his attention to the hole and the plank. This latter the police had forcibly levered up without waiting to extract the nails, which, bent and jagged, were still sticking from it in all directions. In examining and feeling the nails Zambra spent a good ten minutes, and five more in probing, searching the gap in the flooring. At length he turned to Marion.

"We are getting on very well," he said. "The state of this flooring distinctly contradicts the police theory that Mr. Blakesly took the key from its hiding-place and replaced it after robbing the strong-room. That removes the weight of the evidence as to the exclusive knowledge about the key. Whether you would get a jury to believe what I *know* to be a fact is another thing, but I am assured that my view is correct."

"And that is?"

"That neither Mr. Blakesly *nor anyone else* robbed the strong-room at all," was the startling reply; "certainly not by a key procured from this hole. See here," he continued, taking up the plank, "this has been wrenched up by the police, but there are no traces of the nails having been extracted and hammered in again. Had that been so there would have been infallible traces of the tool which removed the nails, and there would have been a certain looseness about them, whereas they are so firmly embedded in the wood as when they were first driven home. I am convinced that this plank has only been raised once since your father fastened it down, and that was when it was levered up, all standing, by the police. Let us get down

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to the strong-room now, and then I shall be able to give you my full opinion so far as Kennett's Cross is concerned."

The door under the stairs leading to the cellar had no lock, a fact duly noted by Zambra, and it opened directly on to a flight of steep stone steps running straight down into the blackness below. At Zambra's request Marion had brought a candle from the sitting-room, and by its flickering light they descended, the detective piloting the way over the inequalities of the worn and slippery stones. The air struck chill and mouldy, and not a ray of daylight penetrated beyond the foot of the stairs. Along each side of the cellar were rows of decaying bins, with the woodwork in every stage of mild rottenness, and, in many cases, completely fallen away.

And there at the further end, in striking contrast to the dank and deserted aspect of the rest, was the smart new brickwork, with its heavy iron door in the centre, which had furnished Michael Standridge with employment during the last months of his eventful life.

There was no hurry in anything that Zambra did, and before using the complicated key which Marion had given him he studied the exterior of the strong-room with all his customary keen concentration.

Even the cobwebbed bins and shelves at this end of the cellar came in for a share of his scrutiny. Peering here, there, and everywhere, he showed himself desirous of thoroughly mastering the approaches to the strong-room before entering it. Fixed to the bin nearest the iron door there was an old wooden bracket.

It was after a prolonged examination of the surface of the bracket that Zambra suddenly thrust the candle he was carrying into Marion's hands, and took from his pocket the pill box which he had produced in the bedroom.

Then to Marion's amazement, he detached a piece of the grease that was guttering down the side of the candle, and compared it with the contents of the box. Looking up sharply, he asked:

"You have not been in the room where the key was found after dark—with a candle, I mean?"

"No, indeed," said Marion. "It is as much as my nerves will stand to go upstairs to my own room without wandering about the house at night."

"Where was this candle kept last night?"

"It was in the sitting-room," replied Marion.

"Exactly, where your uncle spent the night, or rather part of it, for, if I am not very much mistaken, another detective has been going over precisely the ground we have covered to-day, and that detective is no less a person than your reverend uncle Here on this bracket is the shape of the bottom of his flask, imprinted in the dust, just as on the mantelpiece upstairs. And this grease spot which I found on the floor in the bedroom is of the same substance as your candle. By the way, did you buy these candles yourself or find them in the house?"

"I bought them in Wilmington yesterday morning," said Marion.

"That settles it, then," said Zambra decisively. "I thought the spot was a fresh one, and could not have been spilt on the night of the murder. Your worthy uncle has been smitten with a curiosity to go the rounds himself in the dead of the night to see what he could discover on his own account. He must have been sufficiently recovered to do this, you see, though not well enough to be long separated from his flask. And he said not a word to you about his nocturnal travels."

"No," said Marion. "He expressed great anxiety to be of use to me, and put many questions about the missing money and where it could have been hidden by the criminal, but he did not even ask to be shown over the house. Perhaps what you say accounts for what I heard and saw during the night," and she described the banging of the distant door, and the light, suddenly extinguished, that struggled up the stairs from below.

Zambra made no comment, but inserted the key in the iron door and entered the strong-room. The actual space inclosed was only about nine feet by six, much of the area cut off from the cellar being occupied by the massive brickwork lining which Michael had built against the foundation walls of the house. The brickwork rose in the form of an archway, thus forming a vaulted roof of great thickness. The floor, too, was of new bricks closely cemented together; indeed, the only object about the chamber not so constructed was the wooden shelf running across the far end on which the police had found the empty paper gold bags. These had been removed to be produced in evidence.

"I expect Messrs. Gunning and Dimmock's rural myrmidons have been here in such force that they would have destroyed any traces had such ever existed here," said Zambra, after a cursory glance round the gloomy recess. "However," he continued, "there may be a lesson to be learnt here that was not dreamt of in their philosophy," and, taking a foot-rule from his pocket, he proceeded to measure the height and thickness of the walls, sounding them now and again, and repeating the process of the flooring. This done he devoted himself to a long examination of the intricate lock and of the key, nodding in a confirmatory way as the impregnable nature of Michael's stronghold became more apparent to him.

"Come, Miss Standridge," he said at length, "let us get upstairs again to daylight and to work, for I do not think Kennett's Cross has anything more to tell me, and I have one or two inquiries to make in Reading before I catch the 4.50 back to town."

Zambra commenced repacking his bag the moment they reached the sitting-room, and Marion began to fear that he was about to take his leave without enlightening her. But she was mistaken, for the moment the last strap was buckled he said:

"Let us sit down for a little, while I run over the salient points of the case as it stands now. To begin with, my visit has more than confirmed me in my first theory as to how the murder was committed. The footmarks under the laurel bush, and the hidden postmark on the forwarded letter, are quite convincing that there has been foul play of a deeper kind than that implied in the charge against Mr. Cuthbert Blakesly. But I am convinced of something more. I do not believe that a robbery has been committed at all. We both of us put Mr. Blakesly out of the question. Very well, then; no one else would have had the knowledge to go straight to the hole in the floor to get the key after committing the murder, and the state of the plank bears out my idea that it had not been tampered with. We are, therefore, reduced to the supposition that the person who robbed the strong-room must have done so by means either of manipulating the lock or using a duplicate key. An inspection of the lock and of the key has now put this supposition out of court, and I believe that the murderer of your father, who probably expected to find the key on his person, had to go empty away."

"But the missing money," put in Marion; "if it was not taken how do you account for its not being there? My father can hardly have spent it in those few weeks. Besides, he would not have taken all those precautions—have built a strong-room like that—to contain nothing."

"Very true," replied Zambra, "and what is the natural deduction from that? Why, that your father, apprehending some attempt of this kind, took a still greater precaution and concealed the money, not on the open shelf in the strong-room, but bricked up in the walls or in the flooring. Everything points to a great fear on your father's part of some person or persons unknown, whom it is now my duty to find. Look at the elaborate bolts on the front door, and in your bedroom where he slept. Call to mind the hesitation he showed to open the door when Mr. Blakesly came that night, refusing to do so till he had looked from the upper window. Remember his unaccount-

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able change of name, his eccentric desire to have his property actually under his own thumb, and his reluctance to reveal even to you some mysterious 'secret.' I repeat that Mr. Standridge had an ever present dread that someone would deprive him of his means of providing for you should he ever—as he happily did—find you. With your permission I propose to pull down the strong-room and test my theory."

"I do not mind in the least if it will throw any light on the matter," said Marion; "only please remember that with me the first consideration is the finding of the real murderer—not the discovery of the money. All that might go and welcome if only Mr. Blakesly's character were cleared."

"The whole case is bound up together," said Zambra; "and if we clear up part of it, we are nearer to clearing up the whole. Then I shall send down a trusty man to-morrow morning whom I employ on such occasions, and we will soon have the strong-room to pieces. It will be better than employing a local bricklayer, who might talk. It is possible that I may be down again to-morrow myself, though it depends on the progress I make in my inquiries. I have to work upon the origin of the hidden postmark, and I propose to see the principal diamond brokers in Hatton Garden. Your father hinted to you that he made his money at the Cape in that line, and it is just possible that some of these gentry have had dealings with him. And if in the meanwhile you hear from or see your uncle, wire me at once. Apart from any information he can give, I am curious to see a gentleman of such keen detective instincts. I should like to compare notes with him and see if his views coincide with my own. By the way, did you tell him of my expected arrival?"

Marion explained that she had thought it best not to do so.

"Quite right," said Zambra, plainly delighted at his client's discretion; "and I, too, not knowing who he might be, took the liberty of masking myself behind the edge this morning, when I saw him leave your gate. And now, good-bye, Miss Standridge; you will see me again very soon—with good news, I trust. If my man finds anything to-morrow he will see it to a place of safety on your behalf. Again, good-bye."

He took his departure by the rear of the house, so that he might have an opportunity of seeing the brickfield and the remains of Michael's out-door operations. Thence he made his way across an intervening field to the high road, where he found the fly he had ordered waiting for him, according to instructions, half-a-mile from the cross roads. He had walked out in the cool of the morning, and had taken this precaution on his return to avoid attracting notice.

In Reading Zambra called on the second-hand dealer who had supplied the iron door, and found, as he had expected, that there was only one key in existence that would fit the lock, the one that had been sold with it to Mr. Standridge. He reached the station just in time to fling himself into an unoccupied carriage of the London train.

"What a brave girl it is!" he said to himself as he let down the window and settled in a corner seat, "and what is better, no fuss or excitement about her, a model client in every way. I don't like her being alone in that horrible house though. I must try and get her out of it somehow next time. Supposing the individual I am looking for should pay me the compliment to adopt my theory and go back for a second hunt for that silly old man's gold! Another and still more deplorable crime might follow. That disreputable looking uncle, too; it is quite on the cards that his nocturnal prowl may have had a mercenary origin," he exclaimed, as a sudden thought struck him. "I never forget a face, and I will swear that the man I saw in the lane this morning is the same whom I saw foregathering with another raffish-looking customer in the box-lounge at the Royal last Saturday. It was on the cards that he may not have heard of the murder, but a clergyman at a music-hall on the day after his brother's death is, to say the least of it, an all-round anomaly. Yes, it is even possible that he may know more of Kennett's Cross than he ought to. It is worth looking into, anyhow. I will send Lewis down to Morton Delaval by the night mail to make a few inquiries about our reverend friend with the eccentric eye. My own programme must be an hour or two among the diamond brokers in the morning, and then, failing anything fresh, a steady hunt through these suburban preserves we wot of. One thing is very certain—Michael Standridge must have made some peculiar acquaintances at some period of his life."

Thus it was that about half-past eleven the next morning Zambra walked into the offices of Strauss and Lightfoot, in Hatton Garden. The outer room was empty, but at the sound of his entry a stout German gentleman emerged from the private sanctum and asked his business.

"Can you tell me," said Zambra, politely—he had asked the same question half-a-dozen times already—"can you tell me if your firm has had any transactions—considerable transactions, I should imagine — with a person named Wilson or Stanbridge?"

"Ach! my friend, you are of the police, I see," said the German gentleman, mopping his brow. "Beople are always of the police when they ask after oder beoples with two names. I do not remember, but I will the books examine."

Mr. Strauss referred to a weighty ledger on the desk and ran his finger down the index.

"Here we are," he said; "you are in luck Mr. Policeman. Mr. Wilson is the agent who sold us the big Cape diamond last year. I forgot the name for little whiles, but now I remember. Yes, on June 15th, 1891, Mr. Thomas Wilson sold to Strauss and Lightfoot diamonds for £20,380, and he got the cash. I did not the business do myself, so I forgot."

"Can you tell me nothing of his appearance, or what accounts he gave of himself?" asked Zambra. "If not, perhaps your partner could give some information?"

"Alas! my friend, poor Lightfoot, is no longer my partner; he died last Christmas, to my sorrow, and I am alone in the business, My clerk may have seen this gentleman, but, unfortunately, he is at home for two days ill. He writes to-day he may not come for a week. It is a very great nuisance; no partner no clerk."

"So far as I am concerned," said Zambra, "if I can go and see your clerk it will come to the same thing. He may not be too ill to give me five minutes' conversation, and the matter is very important. Would you favour me with his address?"

"Certainly, my friend," said Strauss, writing on a slip of paper, "and tell him from me that if he does not come back soon he the sack will get. There is the address—'*Number 2, Longfellow Road, Worcester Park.*'"

(*To be continued.*)

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Short Stories That . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, May 27th. Post-cards only, please. The prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. E. Fry, 45 Upcott Street, Canterbury Road, Old Kent Road, Hatcham, S.E., whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

SWEET: "I have found this a very cold world." Sours: "That so? It must be a comfort to you to anticipate the next."

BLOOMER (to ragged urchin): "Your parents left you something when they died, did they not?" Urchin: "Oh, yes, sir." Bloomer: "And what did they leave you, my little man?" Urchin: "An orphan, sir."

"IN VAIN! In vain!" Those who heard the youth's hopeless cry gathered about him and sought to help him. "In vain! In vain!" he cried again in agonized tones. "What," asked a benevolent stranger, "is in vain?" "The letter V," he cried. Then the crowd moved on in search of a new excitement.

* AN Irishman joined the Metropolitan Police Force. Soon after he had entered the service, he applied to the Chief Inspector for six days' leave of absence. The Chief Inspector refused, saying that he could not be spared so long. Pat was not satisfied, so he made another application, but this time for forty-eight hours' leave of absence. The Inspector granted him this, but to everybody's surprise Pat did not return till six days after. When asked by the Inspector why he had stayed over his time, he replied: "Sir, we work eight hours a day, and six times eight is forty-eight." They let him off.

ONE morning last week, a porter—a droll fellow—at one of the Midland stations, was several times interrupted in the performance of his duties by a little ugly Scotch terrier, which got in his way. At last he gave the cur a kick, which sent him out of the way yelping. Up came the owner of the dog in high dudgeon wanting to know why John had kicked his dog. "Was that your dog?" asked John, with his habitual *sang froid*. "Certainly it was; and what right have you to kick him?" "Why, he's mad," said John. "No, he's not mad, either," said the owner. "Well, I should be," quoth John, "if anybody kicked me in that way."

HER DIARY.—Met him—met him again—in love with him. Met him again—no longer in love with him, but he is in love with me because I am so beautiful. Met him again—he is still in love with me, not only because I am so beautiful, but because I am also so good. Sorry for him. Again I met him—he is colder than he was. Think he has forgotten my beauty and my goodness. I, however, am inclined to think that I am in love with him after all. How lucky he is, and how angry mamma will be. Mamma proved to be strangely pleased. Makes me angry, for I know she is not a good judge of a young girl's heart. Flirted with him outrageously to make mamma angry—didn't succeed. Engaged to him—glad. Married to him—sorry.

HE: "I always pay as I go." She: "Then why tarry? You don't owe me anything."

SHE: "But I thought you were such a good judge of horseflesh?" He: "Don't know as much about it as our cat."

WILLIE: "Pa, what's a fixed star?" Pa (formerly an actor): "A fixed star, I suppose, is one who gets his salary regularly."

AN absent-minded preacher remarked in a eulogy from his pulpit lately that "Death loves a mining shark." Thereupon four stockbrokers and a man with a brother in Colorado got up and left the sacred building.

A BOY in search of a situation entered a cotton factory, and was proceeding down the yard, when he was met by the manager. "What do you want?" asked the manager. "I want work," said the boy. "What can you do?" asked the manager. "Almost anything," was the answer. "Well, you seem to be a very sharp lad," said the manager, "but tell me this, can you file smoke?" "Yes," said the boy, "if you place it in the vice." He got the place.

"Now, boys, I have a few questions to ask you," said a teacher. "Suppose I have a piece of beefsteak, and cut it into sixteen pieces. What would those pieces be?" "Sixteenths," answered one boy, after meditating a moment. "Very good. Now, if I cut the sixteenths in half, what would they be then?" There was silence in the class, but presently a little boy at the foot put up his hand. "Well, Tommy, what is the answer?" "Hash!" answered Tommy confidently.

A MAN once received as a present from a sea captain a fine specimen of the bird which is known as the "laughing jackass." As he was carrying it home he met a brawny Irish navvy, who stopped and said to him: "Phawt kind of burrd is that, sorr?" "That's a laughing jackass," explained the owner genially. The Irishman, thinking he was being made fun of, was equal to the occasion, and responded with a twinkle of the eye: "It's not yerself; it's the bird Oi mane, sorr!"

As my friend was walking down Market Street the other day, he was accosted by a man selling photos in sealed envelopes. Among the names he mentioned were Roberts, Buller, Cronje, De Wet, and others. My friend, thinking he would have De Wet's photo, selected an envelope on which was written the name of De Wet. After breaking the seal, he found, to his surprise, that the envelope was empty. On informing the man of the fact, he examined the returned envelope and then exclaimed: "Well I'll be hanged; he has escaped again!"

Two Irishmen fresh from the Emerald Isle were walking along Strand Road, in Bootle, near Liverpool, when they saw a gang of men removing a very large boiler from a waggon into a large engineers' yard. One of the Irishmen asked the other "what that thing was," pointing to the boiler, the other said he did not know but would go and ask. He thereupon approached one of the men and said: "Will yez plaze till me what that thing is?" alluding to the boiler. The workman, thinking to take a rise out of poor Pat, said in a casual sort of way "Oh, that's a dog kennel," but Pat fairly flabbergasted him by retorting: "Shure an I thought as much when I saw so many puppies round it."

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We regret to have to announce that the special offer by the *Daily Express* of Chambers's Encyclopædia (Twentieth Century Issue) must SHORTLY BE WITHDRAWN.

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The success of the *Daily Express* enterprise proves conclusively two things—that the public is still quick to take advantage of a really good offer, and that the need for such an Encyclopædia as Chambers's—complete, exhaustive, and above all thoroughly up-to-date—has been long and acutely felt. We have from the first made no secret of the fact that our principal aim in undertaking the distribution of this important work was to secure friends for the *Daily Express*, and that we have succeeded in this is evidenced by the thousands of cordial letters of thanks we have received from delighted subscribers all over the kingdom.

In intimating that the offer must shortly be withdrawn, the *Daily Express* feels it its duty to warn hesitating subscribers that if they do not order at once the chances are they will be too late. There are always many easy-going people who put off action till the last possible moment, with the result that frequently they miss opportunities which they regret. In the present instance many will have to be disappointed. If you do not wish to be one of these, write to-day while there is still time.

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

There is another complete novel in this number, which occupies the first ten pages of the paper. Surely this, added to several short complete stories and a good instalment of a serial, is by far the biggest pennyworth of fiction that can be obtained. If you would be kind to me, you might whisper the name of *Short Stories* to your friends If you think whispering rude, shout it.

"L. B. W."—I believe Mr. C. B. Fry used to contribute to the paper you mention, but he does so no longer. The famous Sussex amateur is, however, a contributor to the *Daily Express*. Some intensely interesting cricket notes emanate from his pen and find a place in that paper twice a week, every Monday and Thursday, I think.

An arithmetical fiend writes as follows: "If twelve persons were to agree to dine together every day, but never sit in exactly the same order round the table, it would take them 13,000,000 years at the rate of one dinner a day, and they would have to eat more than 479,000,000 of dinners, before they could go through all the possible arrangements in which they could place themselves. A has only one change, A B two, A B C six, four letters 24, five 120, six 720, seven 5,040, eight 40,320, nine 362,880, ten 3,628,800, eleven 39,916,800, twelve 479,001,600."

"Who taught London Bridge?" is the latest sample of imbecility that has been sent me in the form of a marked paragraph in a recent number of the *Isis*. With it is a note in writing to the effect that "the honour of teaching London Bridge lies between the Bo Rough and King William's statue!" Why this has been sent to me I cannot understand. I am not aware of having harmed anybody lately.

"Keldie."—The employment of "mutes" at funerals is fast falling into disuse. There are, however, many old-fashioned people who keep up this custom. These mutes date in usage from the earliest Roman times. According to observers, they usually spend their time when on duty in secular gossip, regaling themselves from time to time from suspicious-looking flasks slyly produced from invisible pockets. When anyone passes by the house they relapse into lugubrious silence, and when anyone enters the house they shed a few judicious tears behind deep black-bordered pocket handkerchiefs. At least, we must imagine they do, because the handkerchiefs go up to their eyes with marionette-like unanimity at intervals. Doubtless Dickens, when he satirized mutes and undertakers in "Martin Chuzzlewit," did much to make the fashion honoured more in the breach than the observance.

Readers will please note that the grand Whitsuntide number of *Short Stories* will be published on Saturday next, May 25th, instead of on the following Tuesday.

T. Redwich.—Tyndall, once, when lecturing on electricity, produced the clothes of a man who was taking refuge under a tree when it was struck by lightning. It was a foolish thing, he observed, to go under a tree during an electric storm, unless a person stood some distance from the trunk In this particular case, however, the man's clothes were very wet, and, though they were very much torn, they formed a sufficiently good conductor for the lightning, and he escaped with his life. Had his raiment been dry, he would inevitably have been killed. Producing the man's boots, the lecturer pointed out that the uppers were torn to pieces by the electric fluid in its anxiety to reach the earth, but the sole, into the construction of which iron largely entered, in the shape of hob-nails, formed a good conductor, and was not hurt.

"Annie Laurie" writes from the sunny south. She has lost both her father and mother, and she and her little brother are alone in the world except for an old aunt. She is engaged to a man whom she loves dearly, but he cannot afford to marry her for at least four years. An old friend of her father's has asked her to marry him, and so provide a comfortable home for her little brother, who is a delicate child. She is greatly perplexed as to what to do, and asks whether I advise her to marry the old man, whom she does not care for, or leave her brother with his aunt, and go out as a nursery governess until her lover can afford to marry her?

Yours is a sad case, "Annie Laurie," but on no account should I advise you to marry an old man whom you do not care for, such unions only end in bitter sorrow. Possibly he would soon tir of your brother, and your sacrifice would have been in vain. Your letters are no trouble, write as often as you like.

"Traddles."—The biggest tortoise furnishes about sixteen pounds of tortoiseshell. There are three rows of plates on the back, called "blades" by the fishermen. In the central row are five plates, and in each of the others four plates, the latter containing the best material. Besides these there are twenty-five small plates round the edge of the shell known as "feet" or "noses." A beautiful imitation of tortoiseshell is made of cows' horns.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 4,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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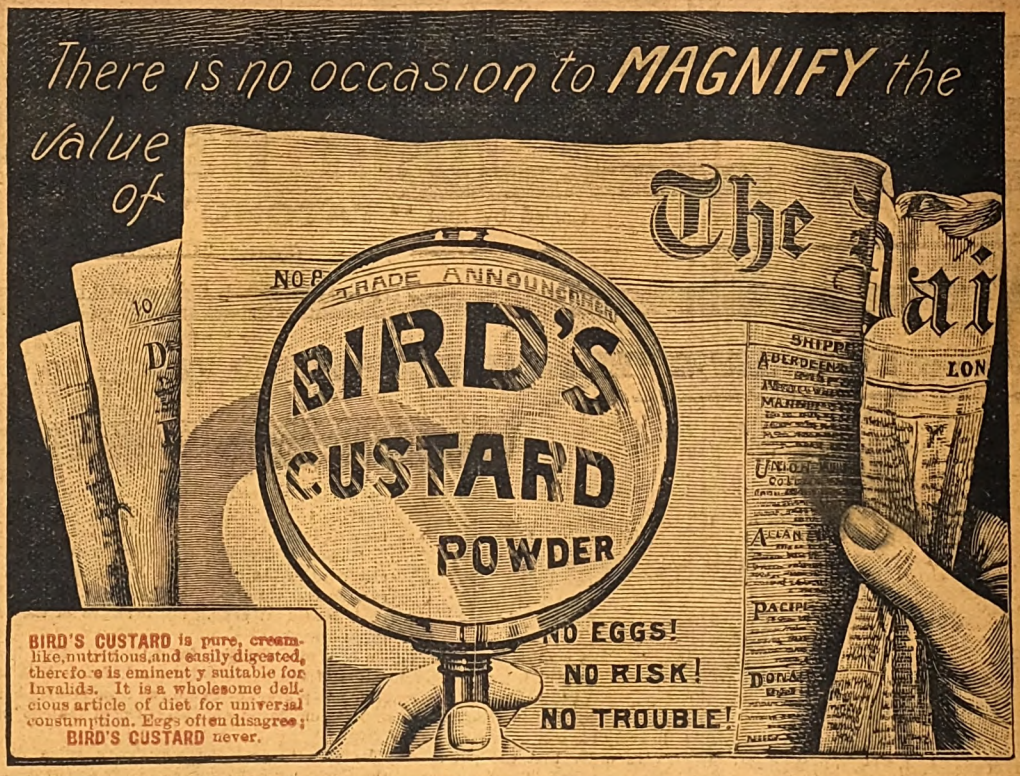

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SHORT STORIES

No. 648.] For the Week Ending June 1st, 1901. [One Penny.

But the figure, still as a statue at first, began moving slowly, remorselessly, towards the bed, with a lifted hand.
See "The Mystery of Grey Towers."

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THE MYSTERY OF GREY TOWERS.

(A Complete Novel.)

By the Author of "The Girl with the Eyelashes," "Through Storm to Sunshine," "Outcast and Heiress," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. ARUNDEL RECEIVES.

"How good of you to come to my little party, Mr. Treverne, and so early, too. We can have a charming *tête-à-tête* before the others arrive," and lovely Mrs. Arundel smiled invitingly at the handsome young Englishman, gently detaining his hand the while with a more fervent pressure than courtesy demanded. "Your brother," she added, "is going to honour my little *soirée* to-night."

"He will follow," said he. "There was a letter which he wished to get off by the evening mail. He never misses."

"Ah, you English!" replied Mrs. Arundel, "what a pattern you are to some other nations! How you love your mothers! Lady Branksome must be delighted to receive every day in foggy England a letter from her eldest son in Paris."

"It is not to my mother that my brother writes every day," he answered. "It is to another lady—younger and prettier. Have you not heard that my brother is engaged?" asked the Hon. Frank Treverne carelessly.

"No, indeed, I had not heard," she said. "May I ask who is the lady?"

"Oh, certainly! An affair of long standing," replied Frank Treverne. "It's Elaine D'Arcy, daughter of the old Marchioness of Brentwood—you know, my mother's most intimate friend."

"How interesting! How romantic!" murmured Mrs. Arundel. "And she is doubtless pretty, this Lady Elaine D'Arcy?"

"Pretty? Oh, of course, she's pretty!" answered Treverne. "You see, I've known her since she was a little baby, and perhaps you don't think girls so pretty when you've grown up with them like that. But she certainly is lovely, though not in my style. An English beauty down to the finger tips. Gerald thinks no end of her, and calls her his 'Lily Maid,' but for my part, I find that sort of beauty expressionless," and he showed clearly by his eyes the kind of beauty he did admire.

"Yes?" questioned Mrs. Arundel innocently.

"Indeed I do!" said Frank. "A brunette for me. Dark, blue-black hair, eyes deep and full of fire, a figure tall, erect, strong, like a queen's——"

Mrs. Arundel rose suddenly.

"Hush, Frank?" (never before had she addressed him by his first name). "No more—I hear someone coming."

"I will not stop," replied the young man. Before she could prevent him he had seized her hand. "Venetia, I must speak now—"

There were footsteps on the polished floor outside, the doors were opened wide, and a tall footman announced: "Monsieur et Madame le Comte et la Comtesse de Candale."

Quickly Mrs. Arundel snatched away her hand, which Frank, in his infatuation, would have retained in spite of the world. He bit his lip in fierce vexation, and the two newcomers, who could not help seeing what was taking place as they entered, shot a critical glance at their hostess and the young Englishman.

Others arrived in quick succession, and Frank withdrew to a doorway, where he stood absorbed, following with his eyes every movement of his hostess. Presently she passed him on the arm of a man in uniform. She was going to the card-room to start a game. He followed her with a swift stride.

"Will you allow me to take you for a ride to-morrow?" he asked eagerly. "You will let me come for you to-morrow morning."

"If you are good now—not unless," she whispered.

The rooms were filling fast, and having established some of her guests at the card tables, Venetia Arundel stood again in the outer salon receiving the late arrivals. Frank no longer hung about in doorways, but strolled through the rooms, his heart beating high with hope and joy as he thought of the opportunity so graciously offered him for the morrow.

"It must mean that she cares," he said to himself. "I was an ass to choose such a moment for saying what I have wanted to say so long. But how could I help it when I looked into her glorious eyes!"

A little after midnight he found himself next to the Comte de Candale, who had been supping without that discretion which should mark a peer of France.

The Count clapped him familiarly on the shoulder. Frank retreated a step and looked at him with that glance of icy politeness which only an Englishman can give.

"Congratulate you!" whispered the Count; "Venetia's magnificent! Ever so many men been after her. I don't mind saying that I have myself, only don't tell the Countess! The question is, why should you have hooked her with all her ambition? If it had been your elder brother, now——"

"I forbid you, sir, to speak in that way of Mrs. Arundel," said Frank, pale with anger.

"You take a liberty, sir, which I cannot allow when you address me, a peer of France, in that tone. I permit no one to insult me, certainly not a conceited English fop, who——"

The words ended abruptly with the raising of Frank's fist. For an instant he felt nothing but a wild rush of anger, and a desire to punish on the spot the man who had dared to speak with insolent, profaning lips of the woman he loved; but suddenly he felt a calm, strong touch on his shoulder, and glancing round he found himself face to face with his brother, Lord Branksome, a tall, self-possessed looking young giant, with the face of Antinous, and the figure of Hercules.

Frank's self-possession returned immediately, and

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without taking any further notice of the Frenchman, he turned disdainfully on his heel and walked away by his brother's side.

"What was it all about?" queried Lord Branksome, when they had made their way to another room. "It seems to me, my dear Frank, that I came just in time to prevent an unseemly row. Surely you were not going to hit the fellow in this house, of all places?"

"I'm afraid I was, Gerald," said Frank, half-ashamed, "and it's a jolly good thing you happened to come up at the moment. You know the man?"

"All I want to know. But you haven't yet told me what the row was about?"

"Oh! he spoke slightingly of Mrs. Arundel; familiarly, you know, as if she were a woman of whom

"If you are good now, not unless," she whispered.

a man might talk as he liked. It made me angry," said Frank simply.

"Look here, Frank," Lord Branksome exclaimed hastily, but could say no more, for Mrs. Arundel herself was at his side.

"I have heard only just now," she said in a low tone drawing him a little aside, "of your engagement, and I must heartily congratulate you." She looked at him as she spoke, with earnest, melting gaze.

"I thank you," replied the young man, returning her glance steadily, though few men could look unmoved into the depths of those glorious eyes. "I have been engaged a long time now; Lady Elaine D'Arcy and I have known each other since her childhood; for she is much younger than I."

"How romantic!" murmured the beautiful woman.

Branksome laughed. "Engaged people must get to know each other some time or other, you know, and we happened to know each other early, that's all."

"But it's that which makes the romance," said the lady. "That you should have known each other so long, yet not got tired. And you will soon be married?" she queried gently.

"I hope next autumn," answered Branksome. "Elaine is very young, and though she is quite well now, when she was a child her heart used to give a great deal of alarm to those who loved her. Else, though she is only eighteen, I might have persuaded her to marry me last year."

"How sad! To marry an invalid requires so much love and self-sacrifice. You are noble, Lord Branksome! A weak heart," she went softly on. "Oh! that is terrible, for I have always understood it to be quite incurable."

"Not at all," replied Lord Branksome. "On the contrary, in Elaine's case the trouble tends to disappear as she grows older. She has only to avoid sudden shocks, and not to over-exert herself, and the doctors say that eventually she will quite outgrow the slight weakness that might be left."

Branksome looked round.

"I must find Frank again," he said, "and remind him of an engagement we unfortunately have later. Good-night, Mrs. Arundel; I must thank you for letting us come to you."

To his surprise, he felt the warm, soft hand close on his. He almost started, and as he looked questioningly into her eyes he met there an expression which brought the blood to his forehead.

"Ah, you English; how I admire you!" said Mrs. Arundel in a low tone. "I am only half-English, you know," she went on, "and I have lived almost all my life on the Continent and in South America. I am home-sick for England, and so much wish to visit it again. I—want to see all your beautiful cathedrals—Salisbury, I am told, is one of the most perfect. Is it not so?"

"Really, I'm sorry to say that I'm no great authority on church architecture," said Lord Branksome; "and, perhaps, because Salisbury is so near our place——"

"What!" cried the lady, "Salisbury near your country house? How very interesting! I did not know——"

"Grey Towers is not more than ten miles from Salisbury," he answered, "and on quiet summer evenings, when the wind is in the right direction, we can hear the cathedral bells."

"I have known nothing like it in my life, which has all been passed in cities and in pleasure resorts—so called," she said dreamily. "You will come again," she continued, "before you leave Paris? You will tell me something of English country life? I am not sure that I shall not by-and-bye settle down in England, and devote my fortune to some social schemes."

As the door closed behind the two brothers, Mrs. Arundel gave a sigh that might have been of pain or of relief. She walked rapidly, with her graceful, easy movements, to the gaming-tables, called a servant, from whom she took some cognac and soda-water, laughed with a certain bitterness, and, nodding to the Comte de Candale, she cried:

"The night is young, *mes amis*; let none of you leave till morning. We will play and be merry. Ah, these English! —they weary me."

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CHAPTER II.

She's Refused Me.

The two brothers, remarkably alike in person, strolled along the boulevard towards their hotel, and for a time neither spoke. The fresh air was a relief after the scented atmosphere of Mrs. Arundel's apartment, and they enjoyed their walk through the gaiety of the Parisian streets. It was after one in the morning, but the cafés were open, and the life of the Boulevards showed no sign of slackening.

"What do you say to some supper?" asked Lord Branksome suddenly, as they passed a well-known restaurant.

"Supper," he said, "why supper?"

"Chiefly, my dear Frank, because I am hungry, and next because I do not feel inclined to go to bed. You'll come with me?"

"I suppose so," Frank had to admit. "But I can't eat anything. I'll go with you and have a glass of wine, though."

"Come, then; let us go to the Italie," said Lord Branksome. "We are sure to meet someone there we know. What do you think of Mrs. Arundel?"

"Think of her?" cried the young man. "I think of her as I should of an angel, if one of them could inhabit this base earth."

"Have you known her long?"

"Long enough to love her with my whole heart and soul."

"You are taking the affair very seriously, Frank."

"How else should I take it?"

"Has the matter gone far, old fellow?" he questioned in a tone of sympathy. "Don't tell me anything unless you like."

"You know that I have no secrets from you, Gerald. I have loved Mrs. Arundel ever since I first saw her, and that is three weeks ago at the opera. She was with those de Candales, and I was taken to her box by Gwynne, of the Embassy. I think I may say that we struck up a friendship on the spot. She invited me to call. I went and saw her alone. She permitted me to go again, and to take you with me. You know the rest."

"But you haven't asked her to marry you?"

"Not actually, but when I am by her side the words come to my lips without my being able to help it. To-night I lost my head—but we were interrupted before I had said all that I meant to say—interrupted by that cad de Candale, with whom I am thankful you prevented me having a row."

"Who *is* Mrs. Arundel?" asked Gerald.

"I don't know; I don't care," replied Frank. "All I know is that she is the divinest of women."

"You are far gone, my dear brother," said Gerald.

As he spoke a fashionably-dressed young man walked up and touched him lightly on the shoulder.

"Thought I might find you two here," the new-comer remarked, falling into a seat at the brothers' table. "Have come from a boring party at the German Embassy, and looked in for a little distraction before going to bed. Where have you fellows been?"

"At Mrs. Arundel's," replied Lord Branksome.

"Oh, was the fair Arundel entertaining to-night?" queried the young man nonchalantly. "She didn't ask me, though she used to once on a time. I should like to have all the money I've lost at cards in her house."

Frank Treverne drew himself up and looked at the speaker with a pale face.

"You speak lightly of Mrs. Arundel, Gwynne," he said, with a note of danger in his voice.

"And why the dickens shouldn't I?" inquired Gwynne of the British Embassy, staring at Frank with surprise.

"Because the lady is one I admire most profoundly, and I will not allow any man to slight her in my presence."

Gwynne flushed.

"You're not too polite, Treverne," he exclaimed, "and I don't like your tone. If I had known that Mrs. Arundel was such a friend of yours, I wouldn't have spoken of her as I did. That's all."

There was an awkward silence. Frank rose, put on his coat, flung a nod to Gwynne and his brother, and turned to go.

"You'll find me at the hotel," he said. "I'm not quite myself to-night, and should like to be alone for awhile. You'll excuse me," and he was gone.

"I'm afraid I put my foot in it with your brother," observed Gwynne; "but I thought everyone in Paris knew that Mrs. Arundel was no better than a decoy for card-sharpers."

Branksome, who was old-fashioned in his ideas of chivalry, coloured like a boy.

"You'll pardon me, Gwynne," he replied, "if I don't accept what 'everyone' knows. I know Mrs. Arundel—not very well, but well enough to feel sure that she is not what you say. If you don't mind, we'll change the subject."

"By all means," answered Gwynne.

Branksome did not see his brother again that night, nor next morning. His valet told him that Mr. Treverne had breakfasted early and then gone out on horseback. At midday Frank returned, still in his riding clothes, and flung himself into a chair.

"She's refused me," he said. No need to speak a name. Branksome knew well enough who he meant. "So kindly, so sweetly, I can only love her the more, though after what she said I dare feel no hope. I wonder if there's another man in the case. If I thought so—oh, let's leave the place as soon as possible. I hate it."

"There's nothing to keep us here, old boy," he said. And ringing for his man he gave orders that all should be prepared at once for a return to England. He had come abroad for Frank's sake, and he longed to see the face of his "Lily Maid." As for Frank, the sooner he could forget the haunting magic of those dark eyes, the better.

"We shall probably never meet her again," thought Branksome, as the salt wind swept his face on the Channel that night, little guessing, as he so told himself, that at that very moment, the woman whose image was reflected on the surface of his mind, wept with passionate love of him, passionate regret for the loss of him, which even yet, if she schemed aright, might not be quite irrecoverable.

CHAPTER III.

Elaine.

On a bright morning of the new year, almost four weeks after his return from Paris, Branksome was down early as his custom was, for never a day passed, when Elaine D'Arcy was staying in the house, that he did not himself choose her a bunch of fresh flowers from the

"Oh, Dear, What Can the Matter Be?" The matter is you're wondering what "G. D." means.

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conservatories to go up to her room before breakfast. Now she had been for a week with his mother, and, with a dozen other friends who made up a Christmas party at Grey Towers, would stop for the Twelfth-night ball. Later, as he came into the great hall, after a walk in the keen frosty air, something soft and sweet fell down from above, well aimed to touch his curly dark head as he passed close under the winding staircase and the overhanging gallery, on his way to the breakfast-room.

He looked up and saw Elaine, who had thrown one of the pink rosebuds he had sent her, and who now smiled down upon him.

A moment more and she had come to him, his flowers thrust into her belt. As she let him take her hands and bend over her, her dainty figure was almost fairy-like in contrast with the tall, strong one of her lover.

It was hardly breakfast time yet, and, to tell the truth, Lady Elaine D'Arcy had come down early on purpose to have a few minutes alone with her lover, who would be sure to be waiting for her. But in her innocent half-child-like way she was a coquette, and so she chose, instead of letting him lead her to the library as he begged to do, to pretend she really must look at her letters, which would be already on the breakfast table.

Sure enough they were there at her place, and picking them up in a most business-like way, she would not permit Branksome to gaze admiringly at her charming profile as she read her correspondence, but made him take up his also.

"I'm sure we look quite like old married people now," she said, laughing provokingly. "But it's *much* nicer as it is."

As they sat thus together by the huge fireplace where the sweet smelling logs of wood crackled, Frank Treverne came in, and after saying something pretty to Elaine, took up his letters with an eager look on his face that Branksome had not seen since those feverish days in Paris.

At the moment of Frank's entrance, he had been on the point of cutting open, with the tiny gold paper-knife which Elaine had given him, a crested envelope addressed in a strange and unmistakably feminine hand.

"Dear Lord Branksome," it began. He glanced down to the bottom of the second page, and saw the name, "Venetia Arundel."

She wondered if he remembered her confiding to him that she hoped to visit England? Well, now she had come. She was at Salisbury, delighting in the quaintness of her surroundings, and, above all, in the glorious cathedral.

He knew that she loved cathedrals. But she could not help feeling lonely, like a foreigner, though she was half-English—indeed, *all* English at heart. A visit from Lord Branksome would cheer her immensely, and would be a kindness to a stranger in a strange land. Might she count upon that kindness—and soon?

"You'll go and see her, won't you, Gerald?" the young man implored. "I've only known she was to be in England for a day or two back. You—you wouldn't be so unfriendly as to stay away?"

There was nothing for it, in the face of such a letter as Venetia herself had written, and Frank's appeal, but to promise that he would call that day, some time, at the White Hart Hotel in Salisbury. But Branksome looked grave when Frank began to intreat that he would "like a dear, good chap, ask the mater to drive over to-morrow, and perhaps invite Mrs. Arundel to the Towers—just to stay over the ball."

"I'm afraid, boy, I can't do that," Branksome said. "She's beautiful and fascinating and all that; and as for myself, I'm awfully pleased to call. But—it's different with mother, and—coming here, you see. It wouldn't be fair to the mater and—Elaine, and the other ladies, knowing so little of her as we do. Now, don't look at me like that——"

But Frank was off, his handsome face frowning and sullen. He knew that it would be no use his asking such a favour of Lady Branksome, who was not fond of making new acquaintances, but for her eldest son she would do anything.

After luncheon, when most of the party had gone driving and Elaine was closeted with an old governess, who had come from miles away to see her, Branksome ordered his favourite horse, and rode away to Salisbury.

Mrs. Arundel had a private sitting-room at the White Hart Hotel, and as she came to him from the adjoining room, holding out both hands half-timidly, the beautiful woman herself appeared indefinably changed. One of her own sex would have known it was because her gown was simpler, the dressing of her hair less elaborate—that altogether she was playing another part, one more suited to the new life which she wished to enter.

Apparently by the merest accident they drifted into speaking of her past. With tears in her voice and her great eyes, she was telling him how cruel had been the mistake she had made in the early marriage, into which she had been forced when fresh from school in a Spanish convent. How wretched she had been in the set to which her marriage had introduced her—racing men, gamblers to whom she had been obliged to be civil, or suffer from her husband's anger.

"I had no women friends," she said in a low quivering voice. "No one to help me—I have no one now. I could not escape, even after his death, from the old circle, though I was so miserable, feeling always I had it in me to be different—nobler, if I only had the chance. Now there is some hope for me in England, perhaps. Oh, Lord Branksome—you could help me so much if you would. Don't be frightened for your brother. Charming as he is, I don't love him in the right way, and I promise you that you, or your mother, Lady Branksome, have nothing to fear from me. Would she come to see me? or is that too much to ask?"

With those soft eyes, welling tears, raised to his, Branksome found himself saying exactly what he had meant not to say. Certainly he would ask his mother to call. And then—yes, actually he was mumbling something about an invitation to the Towers for the Twelfth-night ball.

CHAPTER IV.

The Twelfth-Night Ball.

Lady Branksome called the next afternoon on Mrs. Arundel, and asked her to come for three days to Grey Towers to stay for the Twelfth-night ball. Three days seemed but a short period to accomplish all that Venetia wished to accomplish; yet she felt that it must be then or never, and she had a confidence in herself that was not ill-placed.

Elaine, who was Frank's confidant, grieved with him over

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his disappointment, hoped with unworldly kindness of heart that it might yet be turned into joy, and felt a girlish curiosity to see the beautiful Mrs. Arundel.

It was not quite by accident that she happened to be standing by Frank's side at the great front entrance of the old house when the carriage bringing the interesting stranger arrived; and Venetia's first impression of the rival she meant to displace was of a slight figure in grey cloth and grey fur, cheeks rosy with excitement and exercise, hair shining like gold in the sunset, and eyes soft and sweet as violets.

It was tea time, and Lady Branksome was in the great hall, where presently Lord Branksome appeared, with various members of the house party; and Mrs. Arundel's *début* in English society was accomplished.

Some of the men thought her more beautiful even than Lady Elaine D'Arcy, though, of course, she looked, and was, very much older; but the women were more slow in making up their minds. She was not of "their set," consequently they were inclined to regard her with a certain suspicion.

But as time went on, the coldest of her critics unbent. She dressed quietly, spoke quietly, and seemed to choose the society of her own sex, rather than use her charms to win the admiration of the men.

As for Elaine, the beautiful woman exercised a curious fascination over her, which the girl could not define, still less resist. Venetia petted her, and flattered her, not in words, but by looks and actions. "Never," said Mrs. Arundel, "in all her lonely life, had she met anyone to whom her heart drew so irresistibly. Would Elaine have her for a faithful, loving friend—none the less true because her affection had been born in the first moment of their meeting?"

Naturally, Elaine said "Yes," and wondered at her lover because he did not seem exactly anxious to promote the friendship. Afterwards, she was to guess at a reason for his conduct which would go near to break her heart.

On the morning of the great event the house party became complete, numbering nearly forty in all; and several hundred invitations had been sent out and accepted.

Branksome danced the first dance with his "Lily Maid," a wonderful vision all in white, with pearls he had given her; and when he asked Mrs. Arundel for a waltz he was too late, for she was engaged to Frank for that and several others. However, there was a dance after supper she would save for him, if—he cared. "She would like to dance with him once," she said softly; and though Branksome had wished to ask Elaine for that particular waltz, hoping she would sit out with him and rest, she had not promised it, and therefore he could not well withstand Mrs. Arundel's graciousness.

A curious presentiment of trouble was in his heart as the music for the dance began; perhaps because the air was a wild and sad one, he told himself. He felt a sensation as of a cold weight of lead in his heart, as he went to claim his beautiful partner.

She was in black and gold, and earlier in the evening the brilliant colour in her face had contrasted strikingly with the dusk of her low-cut gown; but now she was pale, and her great eyes shone like jewels.

"I am tired," she said. "Forgive me if I have changed my mind and don't want to dance. Will you take me to the conservatory? I want to rest where it is dim and cool—and where I can't see the crowd—only you."

He led her to the conservatory according to her wish.

The waltz was a popular one, and for the moment nobody else was there. The spot that Mrs. Arundel chose was the most softly lighted, the most retired of all the many nooks arranged especially for *tête-à-têtes*.

Hardly were they seated behind the friendly shelter of a huge palm when, to Branksome's bewildered amazement, Venetia suddenly covered her face with her hands, uttering a low sob. The soft pink light touched rosily the marble of her uncovered neck and arms.

He was embarrassed—confused—yet his duty was to console her. "You are tired, indeed, Mrs. Arundel!" he exclaimed. "Let me——"

"Ah, no!" she whispered. "It is not that. Can't you see—don't you know that my heart is breaking? I oughtn't to have come here. I can't bear it any more."

"Mrs. Arundel," he stammered, "what has happened in my house to grieve you?"

The white ungloved hands stole away from the glorious face. Tears hung on her lashes. She touched his arm with her fingers—that thrilled and quivered.

Her beauty was unearthly—yet not of heaven.

"My own foolishness, my own madness has happened, that is all," she said. "I thought I could endure it. I thought I could school myself to see the only man I ever loved beside the girl he is to marry, but I had not guessed how cruelly hard it would be. Oh, Lord Branksome, don't scorn me. I am asking nothing of you, but I must speak out what is in my heart—or die. Pity me—pity me, for my life is broken."

Very gently he took her hand which rested upon his arm, and after pressing it in a frankly friendly way, laid it upon her lap. "You are weary after this long evening, dear Mrs. Arundel," he said, as though completing his first sentence. "You don't know what you are saying, and I shall forget as though I had never heard it. Now let me take you out by a quiet way, without going through the ball-room; and when your maid has bathed your eyes, you will be ready, if not for the next dance, for the one after that, for your partners can spare you no longer."

So speaking, he rose, and she rose also, though there was a tumult in her breast.

"Oh, how I hate that child who holds him!" she said within her mind. "It *must* be that he loves me. Only honour keeps him true to her. What is she to weigh in the balance against my beauty, my worship for him? I've one more card to play yet, and for his happiness as well as mine I will not hesitate."

CHAPTER V.

MRS. ARUNDEL PLAYS TRUMPS.

LADY ELAINE D'ARCY was a considerate girl, and she had insisted upon her maid going to bed, saying that she much preferred undressing herself after the ball.

She was in her white *robe de chambre*, her thoughts straying to Branksome, and something constrained and uneasy in his manner, as she slowly brushed the yellow hair that curled below her waist, when she started at the sound of a faint tap on the door.

Going to it, she flung it open to see Venetia Arundel, in billowing lace and creamy silk, with fallen masses of ebony hair.

"The Heart Bowed Down" will be lifted next week when "Short Stories" explains the "G. D." mystery.

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"May I come in?" asked the elder woman. "I won't keep you long, but I had to see you."

Poor little Elaine was tired; but she was too generous, too kindly, to turn her new friend away.

"What a quaint, delightful room!" she exclaimed. "I've often wanted to come before, but never dared."

"It is one of the oldest rooms in the house, this favourite tower nook of mine," Elaine answered, "though it is supposed to be haunted, and there is a terrible story connected with the place; but, you see, I'm sensible, and not a bit superstitious."

Stooping she tried the lid. It opened, and disclosed antique draperies, brocades, and velvets, of a long past fashion.

"Tell me the story, won't you?" begged Venetia. "By whom is this room in the west tower haunted?"

Elaine smiled.

"Oh, if you must hear the gruesome story—and so late at night, too! It is said to be haunted by one Lady Branksome of a long past day. She used to live all alone with her servants, to be as far as possible from her husband. There was a quarrel between them which neither would ever make up. She was very jealous, and she accused him of paying too much attention to a pretty maid in the house.

"He sulked for months, and would not come near her. The maid was not dismissed, as the wife had demanded, and one day, when Lord Branksome was intoxicated, he was heard to say that he wished Lady Branksome were dead, that he might marry the girl. Next morning, when her servant went to call her, Lady Branksome was found dead in her bed in this very room."

Elaine looked round dramatically as she spoke.

"And since then her ghost, they say, haunts the tower, where she is seen coming out of the next room, passing the corridor, wringing her hands, and entering here. Lord Branksome was tried for murdering his wife, though there were no marks on the body, and some of the doctors said that she might have died a natural death, but he was acquitted by his peers for want of evidence. The horrid old man did not marry the serving-maid, for only a week after he was thrown from his horse and killed."

Elaine finished, her voice, despite herself, falling to a tragic whisper. She had said that she was not superstitious, and she had spoken the truth; still, she had never told the story to anyone at dead of night before; and, suddenly, as she talked on, fascinated by Mrs. Arundel's pale face and wide dark eyes, a curious shudder ran through her slight body, shaking her from head to foot. For the first time she felt a sensation of nervous dread, at the thought of being left alone in the darkness in this, her favourite room. "Shame upon you, foolish girl!" she said to herself. "As though dear old Mary were not just overhead—and Lion sleeping in the alcove."

So she reassured herself, not willing to remember that supposing there were such things as ghosts, neither faithful Mary nor brave Lion could defend her from the terror. Still she could not banish from her mind the remembrance of a certain portrait hanging in the picture gallery, an image, oddly enough, called up by the white face and great eyes of Mrs. Arundel. There was no real likeness between the two countenances; but both were pale, surrounded by loose black hair, and lighted by eyes almost terrible in their dark glitter.

Venetia glanced over her shoulder. "You are brave indeed!" she whispered. "But I—I am half-Spanish. I look on things differently. Women in my family have sometimes had the gift of second sight. I do not *think*—I *know*—that spirits do come back to earth and haunt the scene of their own or other's crimes. My mother once said—but no! why should I frighten you? It is not likely that a child like you would be troubled even at this time of year, when they say that spirits walk—after that sacred day you English call 'All Hallow's Eve' until after Twelfth Night. Still, suppose that the old oak panelling behind all these beautiful tapestry hangings should open, that a figure should steal forth, shining with unearthly light? What would you do? Would you then be as brave as you are now?"

Elaine shook her head until all the golden tendrils over her brow might have been fairy bells, ringing out a fairy chime. She tried to laugh. "Oh, if anything so horrible happened, I shouldn't be brave at all, but a coward. If I saw such a sight in the darkness I think I should surely die; for though I am well, and almost quite strong, I have still a heart that plays me strange tricks sometimes—less often every year. But the doctor says until I have entirely outgrown the old weakness I must avoid all shocks; and though he did not tell me so himself, I once overheard Lady Branksome warning Mary to be careful of me, as Dr. Passmore had said a serious fright would probably kill me."

"The Minstrel Boy to the War has Gone," thinking about the "G. D."

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"Well, I know that for all the money in the Bank of England I would not sleep here alone; but you have a better-regulated mind than I have, my dear, as well as cooler blood," said Venetia. Perhaps before her mental vision also rose a presentiment of that old portrait of the murdered Lady Branksome in the picture-gallery, for she had seen it, and, questioning Frank regarding its history (because of a certain resemblance she fancied to herself), she had been told the very story Elaine had repeated to-night, thereupon forming the plan whose execution she regarded now as "playing her last card."

"Don't look so frightened," cried Elaine, regaining courage; "if you do, I shall feel almost capable of imagining I see the ghost myself in the darkest hour before the dawn."

"Hush!" Venetia Arundel raised a warning finger her eyes larger and blacker than ever. "What was that? Didn't you hear it?" She seemed to be looking through the very walls of oak and stone; then, rising hastily, she glided to a corner of the room, and, lifting the tapestry that covered the ancient wainscotting, she laid her ear against the wood.

The "Lily Maid" was quite herself again now. Half-laughing, half-annoyed, she rose also from her seat beside the dying fire. "What nonsense!" she exclaimed. "If you heard anything it was a rat. I daresay there are whole families in the old wainscotting."

Venetia remained for an instant with the tapestry in her hand. "Yes, this is the right place," she rapidly told herself, her heart beating triumphantly; while aloud she said: "Forgive me! But it was really like a light step behind the panelling, and the sweep of silken draperies. 'Nonsense,' as you say, yet everything seems possible in this old house, and for a moment I was startled."

Venetia dropped the tapestry, and coming close to the girl laid her large beautiful hands on the slight shoulders.

"I have been talking foolishly, have I not, dear girl? But it was because I haven't made up my mind yet to saying what I came here to say. I wonder—oh, I wonder how I am to do it?"

Elaine looked up into the dark face in surprise, for the elder woman's voice suddenly had become low and tragic.

"There's something I want to tell you," Venetia went on, "because I love you, dear, and we are friends, aren't we?"

With her little childish hands she drew Venetia down on a big cushiony chintz sofa beside her.

"Of course we are friends," she said, "and you may trust me."

"Trust you never to tell anyone on earth what I am going to say to you—to hint to no one, not even—Lord Branksome?"

Elaine hesitated—perhaps touched with a vague presentiment.

"I—I should hardly like——" she began, but Venetia impetuously cut her short.

"Ah, then, I must go away without having spoken!" she cried with something like a sob, and Elaine's tender heart reproached her.

Believing without a doubt that the confidence to come concerned either Frank Treverne or possibly some event in Mrs. Arundel's past of which she felt impelled to speak, Elaine no longer held back her promise.

"Very well," she said, "I will tell nobody in the world what passes between us."

"You swear it?"

Elaine lifted her proud little head.

"My word is enough," she answered. "I have never broken it, and never will."

"Elaine," she said softly, calling the girl for the first time by her name, "I am going now to test your strength and courage. You will need both, I fear. Ah, I would spare you this if I could, but it is better that you should know it before it is too late, that you may be spared the bitterness I suffered when I was an innocent young girl like you, in marrying a man who—did not love me."

Lady Elaine D'Arcy did not comprehend. *She* was going to marry a man who worshipped her, as she worshipped him—they had been all in all to each other for years. What did Mrs. Arundel mean by speaking of the two cases together?

"I don't understand you," she faltered. "I—did you not wish to speak of yourself and Frank? Why should I need strength and courage to hear anything you can have to tell me?"

"Because," and Venetia took both the little hands, that were growing cold now, "because I must hurt you—let you know the truth, which is, that Lord Branksome does not care for you as he has tried to make you believe. Perhaps he did once, or thought he did, but now—oh, men are all like him, fickle and false for the first face that takes their fancy! I never dreamt how it would be, or I would not have come to this house. In Paris, to be sure, there were a few words, but I did not know then he was engaged, and I fancied he was only flirting a little. Then he asked his mother to call when I was in Salisbury—it was all his doing, you know, and I came here when she had invited me, hoping to be so happy.

"But the very first night I arrived, he sent me a letter—such a letter!—by my maid. I did not answer it, for already I loved you, and pitied you. I would have gone away if I could, but that would have been impossible without making gossip. The only thing was to ignore what had happened. But to-night I can do so no more. You saw him take me to the conservatory, instead of dancing? You were looking at us, I know. He begged me to run away with him, offered to throw you over to-morrow, called you a child—a little wax doll—compared with me. I got away from him when I could, and at first I meant to leave this house in the morning without telling you. But I felt that would be doing wrong. It was my duty, hard as it must be for both, to let you hear the truth, and save you, perhaps, from a wretched loveless life."

So tempestuous had been the torrent of her utterances that Elaine had not been able to stem it with a word. But she sprang up at last, facing Venetia with eyes blazing like sapphires, a carnation stain on either cheek.

"I won't believe it!" she cried. "I won't believe it. I thought you were a good woman, but I ——"

"You must believe it!" broke in Venetia. "I risked your anger for your own good. I would not have spoken without proof. Read this letter—for my own justification, I insist."

Her great eyes compelled the girl's obedience, hypnotizing her against her will to take the sheet of paper which was thrust into her hands. Then the words

"When other Lips and other Hearts" the meaning of "G. D." shall tell.

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written there seemed to print themselves in fire on her brain, without her own volition. She did not mean to read Gerald's letter to another woman (for now, despite herself, she did believe that it was his) but she could not help it.

"My beautiful, glorious Venetia," she read. "You have made a madman of me. It has come to this—that I cannot live without you. Is a child to stand between me and a woman like you? She will forget me in a week, but with me, you and life are one. It cannot be that I love you so without waking some return in your heart. Give me some hope to exist upon. I will throw over everything for you——"

Elaine saw no more, for a ruddy mist came between her eyes and the paper, only the signature: "Yours till death and after,—GERALD."

The letter fell from her hand, and as it fluttered to the floor, Venetia Arundel caught it, and flung it into the fire. It was a singularly clever forgery, for she had a skilled hand, and was playing for high stakes. It had taken her quite two hours to write by the aid of a formal little note from Branksome, written in Paris and kept till now; but it had served its mission, and must be destroyed before it could work her harm, instead of good.

"Do you believe now, my poor, poor child?" she questioned gently, laying caressing fingers on the girl's white arm.

Elaine started, as though she had been stung by an adder.

"Do not touch me," she commanded. Then the fire died from her eyes and her head dropped. "I don't mean that," she faltered; "it—it isn't your fault. You have done right to tell me."

"Oh, thank you for those words!" passionately breathed Venetia. "I am rewarded for the cruellest task of my life. But—to show me that you forgive, confide in me what you intend to do."

"I will see Ger—Lord Branksome to-morrow, and—give him his freedom."

"Ah, no!" ejaculated the elder woman. "You forget, you promised me before I spoke that you would not breathe a word of what I was about to tell you."

"I thought then your confidences were to be all about yourself. If I had dreamt——"

"Still, I hold you to your word, which you said just now had never been broken."

"Then," answered Elaine, "I will keep my promise. I will merely tell him that our engagement must end, and refuse to explain."

"What a child you are, my poor *petite!* As though he would not force you to explain—you don't know men as well as I. The only way is to write—to-night, and not see him again before you go, as of course your pride will compel you to, even as my honour compels me. If you wish to punish him for the wrong and the slight he has put upon you, you will write and hide from him. You should write a proud letter—a stinging letter—that will make him see at least you are a woman, not to be despised as a child. Ah, what a letter *I* could write to such a man were I in your place!"

"But I cannot," said Elaine. "I am not a woman like you, and I don't know how to sting or torture him, even if——" She stopped.

"Then let me dictate to you a letter that he can never forget to his dying day, because of its reticences, to bewilder and goad him. It is right that you should have your revenge."

"No," Elaine began; but Venetia Arundel's eyes fascinated her.

"You will write what I advise, will you not, dear child?" she commanded, rather than implored, never removing her eyes from Elaine's.

"Yes," said the girl dreamily, "I will write."

"Then come with me to your desk, and I will tell you what is best to say."

She slid her arm round Elaine's waist, and they moved together to the pretty davenport by one of the windows.

"Be seated, sweet one. Say: 'I am growing more tired every day of this engagement of ours. It was begun when I was too young to understand my own heart. I do not approve your conduct of late; I approve nothing that you do. I have thought the matter over carefully, and have concluded that it will be better for us to part. I thank Heaven that I have found courage to say this before it is too late.—ELAINE D'ARCY.'"

The girl sat with the pen in her hand, but did not obey until Venetia's soft hands and Venetia's piercing gaze had done their work again.

"Give the letter to me, dear," Mrs. Arundel said. "I must pass Lord Branksome's room to reach my own, and I will put it under his door. Then he will know, when he first wakes in the morning, that he can cozen and cheat you no longer. Now, my darling child," she said soothingly, "rest if you can, knowing you have done the right thing."

Once more she laid her hand on the girl's forehead, keeping it there until the eyes closed.

"Think that I am right," she murmured insistently. "Keep it in your mind that I have made you do the right thing."

With a long, parting gaze she glided away, leaving Elaine sitting at the desk, her head bowed, and her gleaming lengths of hair veiling her little figure.

When Venetia had gone, she did not move, but sat still as she was, while the moments passed, and the tall old clock in the corner ticked placidly on, and the embers dropped in the fireplace.

She took a few steps toward the door, swayed as a lily sways in a summer storm, and had only time to stagger to the bed, when she lost consciousness.

KNOW WHAT THE "G. D." IS?
SEE NEXT WEEK'S
Short Stories.

CHAPTER VI.

HER LAST CARD.

IF Elaine had succeeded in going to Mrs. Arundel's room, she would not have found her there. Venetia had that to do which brooked no delay, and every detail of her plan had been carefully laid. Should she fail, there was not much hope that the letter she had extorted from Lord Branksome's *fiancée* would serve its purpose. If Elaine were alive and at Grey Towers in the morning, her lover would seek her; there would certainly be an explanation, despite the hard-won promise, for Branksome was not a man to accept dismissal without a struggle.

She did indeed intend to "help" Elaine away from Grey Towers; but it was the spirit which was to

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go, not the body. That might stay for all Venetia cared when her work was accomplished. She did not mean to murder the girl—oh no; it would be as unnecessary as disagreeable, she hoped, to soil her hands with a crime. But for all that, the "Lily Maid" was to be "helped away," as she had said; and the letter would no doubt so greatly aid Lord Branksome in bearing his sudden loss that his conscience might soon allow him to seek consolation from one most ready to give it.

"He *must* love me," she repeated to herself as she sped away from Elaine's bedroom. "How could he have seen me, and known my worship for him, yet still keep faith in his heart with a puny, cold child like that? Impossible! He is mine, or shall be—and what I do to-night, I do for him as well as myself."

As the woman passed through the corridor which separated Elaine's room from the rest of the house, the clock in the east tower struck four.

"It is well," she thought. "Everyone is in bed, and I need have no fear."

The passage was lighted by a softly shaded electric lamp, and when Mrs. Arundel had slipped Elaine's letter under the door of Lord Branksome's room, she went on beyond her own until she gained the head of the main staircase, where she again stood and listened. Not a sound reached her ears, and she proceeded along the corridor until she came to a small winding staircase which led upwards.

"How clever it was of me to persuade Frank into showing me the chests with the costumes of his dusty ancestors. It was the one link in the chain that was missing, and now, as I know so well where to find what I want, even that is complete. He little guessed the purpose to which that one of the dresses in which I took most interest would soon be applied."

Venetia quickly ascended the winding stair until she found herself at a door which closed the way. Pushing this gently, it yielded, and she passed through into a long, dark corridor, where it was quite dark, but she took a box of matches from the pocket of her *robe de chambre*, and, lighting one, proceeded cautiously.

Doors opened off on the right and left, but Mrs. Arundel held straight on until she reached the last upon the right. Gently turning the handle of the door, it opened, and she slipped in, closing and locking the door behind her. She found herself in a large room, with old boxes and chests ranged along the walls, and after a moment's hesitating glance, she walked straight to a large and ancient receptacle bound with curious brass-work. Stooping, she tried the lid. It opened, and disclosed antique draperies, brocades, and velvets of a long past fashion. "Fortune favours me," she said to herself. "I need not waste time with the keys I brought. I was sure I had got Frank away without locking it, but there was the bare chance that someone had come up into the attic afterwards. Now the ghost of the murdered Lady Branksome shall be tricked out right royally."

Kneeling down, Mrs. Arundel lifted from the chest a skirt and bodice with ruffs and laces and head-dress, and bore them to her room, where she quickly dressed herself in the old Stuart gown. The costume fitted her well enough, and as she looked at herself in the long mirror she smiled. Her masses of black hair were taken up and combed flat on her head, where an old-fashioned tiara held them in place. A plentiful use of powder applied to her face gave her a deadly, ghost-like pallor, from which the great dark eyes shone out with unnatural light.

"It's a bold game," Mrs. Arundel murmured, as she gazed at her image, well pleased with the change in her appearance, "but I'll carry it through. I am playing for a great stake—the man I love and a title. That little girl is not to be considered. Who is she that she should stand in my path? And I love Gerald—love him with all the power of my heart and soul. With this Dresden china doll out of the way what a life there is before us—Gerald and me!" She lost herself for a time in dreaming, and awoke with a start as the tower clock boomed half-past four.

"Now is the time," she whispered. "The girl will have cried herself to sleep, like the baby she is. I have already frightened her well about the ghost, and she, poor coward, has told me that the sight of it must surely stop for ever the beating of that weak heart of hers. Yes, luck has favoured me so far; may it be so to the end! And it must be—it shall be—even if—if the ghost's fingers must stop her breath as well. Yet I hope it won't come to that. The death by fright will be the simplest; it leaves no traces, and I can get through the secret panel and back to this room before there can be any alarm, scream she ever so loudly."

She gave another long look at herself in the glass, then cautiously opened her door and stepped out, closing if after her. It was but three or four steps from her room to a small recess in the oak wainscotting of the hall, in which was a sliding panel that led to a narrow passage communicating with Elaine's bedroom, and passing thence down a stairway out to the garden, as Frank had mentioned among other details of interest, concerning the historic old house that was his home. Few even of the servants at Grey Towers knew of the existence of this secret way, for it had not been thought advisable that nervous subjects should be needlessly frightened. But Frank Treverne, when showing Mrs. Arundel round the old house soon after her arrival, had not been able to resist her coaxing, or the temptation of telling the woman he loved how to slide back the panel in the hall.

With extended right hand, Mrs. Arundel felt for the groove in the oak wainscotting which would make the door slide back. The simple mechanism was in good order, and a slight pressure of her finger caused the doorway to open. Mrs. Arundel stepped within, and quietly closed it behind her. She was now in a narrow passage, so narrow, indeed, that there was but just room for her to walk.

She advanced cautiously until she judged that she must have reached the position of Elaine's bedroom, and then, trusting to the thickness of the oaken walls not to betray her, she struck a match, which cast its light along the wall. A projecting knob caught her attention, and she felt sure that this must be the means of sliding back the door which led into Elaine's room.

Composing her face into a rigid, ghostly stare, she raised aloft one beckoning white hand, and with the other pushed back the panel.

It slid noiselessly in its groove, and by the dying fire-light, which shed a faint red radiance in the room now that the candles had burnt out, Mrs. Arundel could see that Elaine was lying on the bed, dressed in the same white *robe de chambre* which she had worn an hour earlier.

"Father O'Flynn, you've a Wonderful Way wid Yer," but interpret "G. D." if you can.

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Elaine was not asleep.

"Ah, if it should have been only a horrible vision!" she thought. "How happy I should be, how thankful! To have morning come, not the beginning of a wretched striving to live without him, and never to show I cared, but to know that he was mine as he always has been.

A moment more and she had come to him, his flowers thrust into her belt.

that no shadow had come between us, to put us for ever apart."

Tears stole from under her long, curled lashes, and she let them fall unregarded.

She dared not go to Venetia now, for she did not know how long a time might have passed since she had fainted; and supposing that she had dreamt Mrs. Arundel's visit, what excuse could she make for rousing her from sleep at such an hour? At least, however, she could not lie still until morning; she moved restlessly, and as she stirred, something else stirred.

There was a slight clicking sound. Then a soft rustling as of a woman's draperies, and a deep, long sigh.

Elaine's eyes opened widely; for a moment she lay absolutely motionless, listening with strained hearing, doubting her own ears.

Surely she had fancied the silken rustling. The ghost story that she had talked of with Venetia—no doubt that had keyed her imagination to this uneasy pitch.

But then—had that talk been real, or only a dream? If it was real, then all the rest must be so, too.

Again there came that low, mysterious sigh, and a rich "weep, weep" of silk that trailed across the floor. There was a faint, disagreeable odour, also, like phosphorus.

Elaine grew cold as ice, and her heart knocked like a hammer against her side. She felt as though her limbs were turning to stone, and yet she must move, she must see the thing that stared and breathed in the ruddy dusk.

With a violent effort, which seemed to tear nerve and muscle, she forced herself to turn, then to sit up, and look in the direction from which the stealthy noises came.

There was just enough firelight left to throw up out of the shadows a white face, indistinctly featured, a form that seemed to tower unnaturally tall, beyond the common height of woman, while the horror was increased by a dim gleaming which streaked the hair and the folds of quaintly-fashioned drapery.

It was the ghostly presentment of the old portrait in the great gallery, from which Elaine had always turned away her eyes.

For a long moment that seemed an hour Elaine stared at the vision, frozen with horror, yet striving to believe the sight a mere trick of her imagination. But the figure, still as a statue at first, began moving slowly, remorselessly toward the bed, with a lifted hand, and pointed fingers tipped with sparkling, pallid light.

Elaine's senses reeled, and uttering a wild cry of extremest terror that went echoing through the house, her heart contracted with a sudden, wrenching pain, and she fell back again into unconsciousness.

A laugh broke from the lips of the ghost; but scarcely had the tall figure turned to flee with haste towards the open panel, when a growl of rage followed the scream and the cruel laugh, and a huge yellow and white body bounded after. With a spring, Lion, the St. Bernard, had leapt upon the graceful shoulders, and had borne the apparition to the ground.

Despite his victim's shrieks and desperate struggles, he held her down with two gigantic paws, and buried his teeth in the round, polished throat, choking the wild cries into incoherent mutterings.

CHAPTER VII.

Lord Branksome had not gone to bed. The scene with Venetia Arundel had been a disturbing one, and a presentiment of trouble was in his mind.

He could not be unchivalrous to a woman and a guest, no matter how shamefully she had forgotten herself, yet he could scarcely endure, after what had passed, that she should remain even for another four-and-twenty hours under the same roof with the girl he loved, and whom she had tried to wrong. Exactly what he had dreaded he had not known; but he was thankful for Frank's sake, as well Elaine's and his own, that Mrs. Arundel's visit would end on the morrow.

Never had he loved Elaine so dearly as he did that night, when he so clearly saw the contrast between her sweet purity and Venetia's selfish abandonment. For a moment it had seemed to him, as he bade his "Lily Maid" good-night, that he must warn her against Mrs. Arundel; but he had checked himself for what he

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felt to be honour's sake, as the words had sprung to his lips.

Feeling no inclination for sleep, he had thrown a great-coat over his evening things, and gone out, late as it was, to cool the heat of his blood with a walk in the wintry night air.

Scarcely conscious of the way he took, he had wandered for a couple of miles under the frost-gemmed trees of the park before he told himself that it was time to go back to the house.

Suddenly a strange impatience seized him. He felt impelled to return with all haste, he knew not why.

At last the tower which was called by family consent Elaine's came in sight. He looked up wistfully at the windows. "My little white darling—'my Lily Maid!'" he said to himself, half-aloud.

As he so thought a wild cry rang out to the night, and he knew the voice was Elaine's.

What followed was vague and confused to his mind. He had no recollection afterwards of getting into the house or hurrying to the tower. He only knew that presently he was there, and that the door of Elaine's room was open, the old woman who had been the girl's nurse wringing her hands and wailing for help upon the threshold.

"I can't wake her—she's dead! That awful woman has killed her!" were the words that pierced Branksome's ears and his heart, as he pushed his way past the stout form, and strode into the room, followed by Frank, who had been awakened by the scream.

"Elaine! Elaine!" he cried, and the voice she loved waked her from unconsciousness, and she answered him from the bed where she still lay.

"Great Heaven, it's Mrs. Arundel!" he ejaculated, and as Elaine, hearing the words, and seeing with dazed eyes the thing that was happening, cried to Branksome to save Venetia from the dog, he sprang forward, and caught the now savage animal by the collar. "Let go, Lion, let go!"

For a horrible moment the dog would not obey, but shook his victim back and forth by mangled throat and cheek, while her hands fluttered helplessly.

To Elaine, as she regained her senses, the sound of Mrs. Arundel's name came as a revelation. A word from her, and the great dog loosed the quivering woman on the floor.

Branksome, assured that Elaine was not dead, but living, had bent over the wreck of Venetia Arundel's rich beauty, but Frank, with a groan of horror at what he saw, pushed his brother aside. "This is my place," he said. "Let me come to her."

Lord Branksome rose to his feet, and with a gesture, kept out those who would have pressed into the room, and held out his arms to the pale and silent Elaine.

"My darling," he said, "you must let me take you away. This is no sight for your eyes. Why this poor woman is here at such an hour in this costume, with the secret panel open, I don't know, but I begin to guess, and whatever was her motive, I fear it was no good one."

"No!" came a gurgling voice from the bleeding lips of Venetia Arundel. "Don't—leave me. It was for you—I did it. I loved you. Ah, you are cruel! You think only of her."

As she shook an impotent hand at Elaine, Frank covered his face, with a sob which mourned the loss of his sweet ideal, and snatching his "Lily Maid" in his arms, Lord Branksome carried her out of the room.

* * * * *

Venetia Arundel did not die. For ten days she remained at Grey Towers, shut away from the sight of all save the surgeon who had sewed up the mangled wounds made by Lion's revengeful teeth, and who attended her every day.

All the guests were gone, their curiosity as to the mystery of the night after the ball, more or less satisfied by the statement that Lady Elaine D'Arcy's dog had attacked Mrs. Arundel in his mistress' room and seriously injured her.

Even Frank had departed for a trip abroad of indefinite length, and the household consisted only of Lord Branksome, his mother, and Elaine, who had stayed that poor, nervous Lady Branksome might not miss her presence at such a time of gloom.

The "Lily Maid" would have gone to Venetia's bedside to speak kind and soothing words, if the sick woman would have received her. But when the trained nurse who had been brought down from London gently said that Lady Elaine D'Arcy wished to see Mrs. Arundel, the scarred face was fretfully turned away. Only half-an-hour before, the nurse (who knew none of the real circumstances), had repeated to her charge an item of gossip she had heard downstairs. Lord Branksome and his *fiancée*, Lady Elaine, were to be married much sooner than they had expected, almost at once, in fact. And so the invalid moaned irritably when she heard that her successful rival waited at the door.

"Send her away!" she ejaculated. "I won't have her come here to stare at my poor face, that will never be what it was so long as I may live. I hate her! Tell her to go and not to come back again."

Naturally the nurse gave the message in a softened form; but Elaine had heard, and hurried away, shivering.

Next day a heavily-veiled woman moved slowly out of the house, leaning on the arm of her nurse, and stepped into the carriage that waited for her.

As she reached the door, Lord Branksome, implored by soft-hearted Elaine, approached her for a grave word of forgiveness at parting. But with a cry and a repellent gesture she went by him, thus passing for ever out of his life and his "Lily Maid's."

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"	XVIII.	...	... Is the King a Good Fellow?

"I'll Sing Thee Songs of Araby," and find out what the "G. D." means next week.

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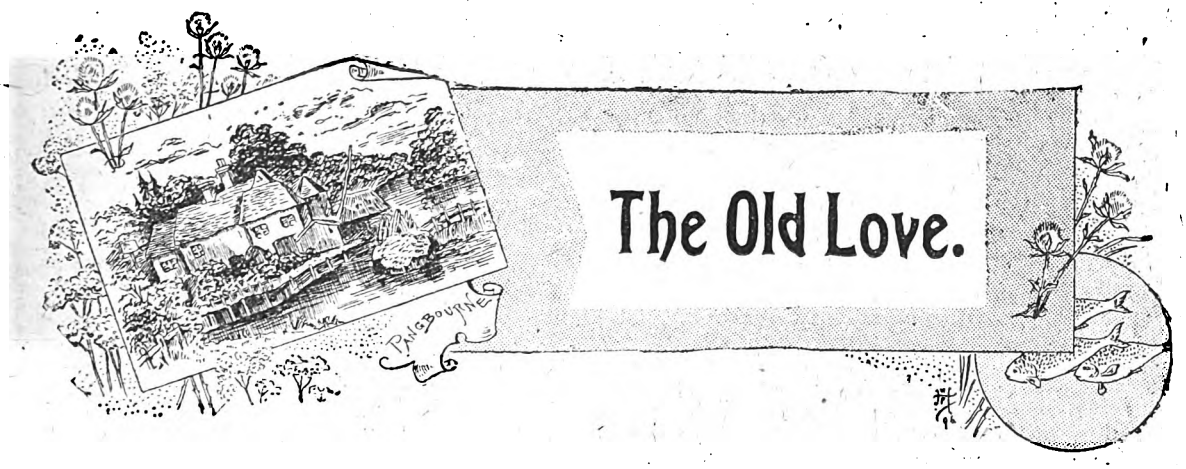

The Old Love.

JACK BARRY walked out of the hotel the picture of physical health and strength.

He was handsome too, and had he but been rich, the girl who could have refused his proffered hand would have been a curiosity. But alas, like most of his comrades, he was poor. Not that he cared a continental, as he would have said to himself, but he ascribed the one back-handed slap that he had ever received from Dame Fortune to his poverty.

Of course it was a girl that did it. Young officers take nothing seriously except girls—and unfortunately very few girls take young officers seriously. It was one thing to flirt and dance with a handsome fellow in uniform, with a stripe on his trousers and painfully new-looking shoulder-straps on his shoulders, and quite another to marry him.

Jack had fallen in love with a girl almost before the ink on his commission was dry, he had danced attendance on her a whole summer at the seaside, and just before he left to join his regiment, he had proposed, and had been quietly, but firmly, rejected.

The rejection was a stunner. He was convinced that the girl was in love with him. He rather thought that he was treating her with unusual fairness by being actually in love with her. She tumbled him off a very lofty perch with a little half-whispered "No."

He hardly believed his own ears when she said it. Then he suddenly discovered how much he really did love her. He could not live without her—no, not a day. He meditated suicide all one night, resolved to commit it, unfortunately went to sleep in his chair, woke up with an enormous appetite, ate a good breakfast, and—changed his mind. He concluded that it would be much more romantic, and would make her feel worse, to waste his life, and then, some day, to tell her it was all her fault.

Ah! She would understand it all then.

After joining his regiment, however, Jack did not get an opportunity to waste his life. His colonel was an ideal cavalryman, there was plenty of work to do, and he sent two years practically abroad.

It was a good thing for him. It kept his mind at work; he had no opportunity to spend his pay, and, therefore, was obliged to save it; so, at the end of that time, when he managed to get a three months' leave of absence, he had a little money and a good deal of common sense.

He had developed. Instead of wasting his life, he found that he was full of healthy ambition, and while he could not forget that girl, he had grimly resolved to get along without her.

He did propose to do one thing, however, and that was to get to London as fast as railways would carry him, call on her, and let her know how well he was getting along without her.

He reached his hotel at noon—he was just leaving his hotel to call on her at eight.

She lived in Mayfair. It was a delightful winter night, and with a full moon, and he walked down to the house repeating on the way a dozen times or more the question, "Is Miss Burroughs at home?" so that his voice would not tremble the slightest particle even before the servant. His voice did not tremble either when the critical moment arrived, but he was a little astonished that the servant should usher him into the drawing-room without saying a single word, or even asking his name. He was still more astonished to find that there was no light in the room save the stream of moonlight that slanted in at the windows and the faint reflection from the street. Astonishment was not the word for the occasion when he saw Violet Burroughs herself leaning on the sill of the window in the moonlight, and he almost gasped when she said in the most matter-of-fact way:

"I knew you would come back."

"Did you?" he exclaimed, sinking uninvited into a chair.

"Yes," she repeated.

Then he noticed that she was crying.

"I hope that I don't intrude. Perhaps I had better call again?"

She paid no attention to the suggestion, but still looking out of the window, said:

"Your voice has changed already—a great deal."

"Yes, I suppose it has," he answered.

"You said you would be a changed man, but I did

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not suppose it would affect you so soon," she continued. "Oh, it is dreadful, isn't it?"

"My voice? I did not know that it was. I'll have it trained."

"How can you jest? You know I mean this affair of ours—your love for me."

"Oh!"

"When you jest you make me feel that you are desperate. You will not commit suicide, will you? Promise me that you won't?"

The conversation was becoming rather rapid. Jack had called for the purpose of saying not a word concerning the old love that he had so nearly buried; for the purpose, too, of letting her see how well he had buried it, and how nicely he was getting along without her, after all; and here she was, plunging into it herself in an almost unladylike manner, and dragging him along after her.

More than that, she was rapidly opening the old wounds; and still more, she was resurrecting the old love. Why was she crying? Why did she expect him? How did she even know he was in town? She must have expected him to call that very evening; else she would not be acting in this—to say the least—highly informal manner. But the thing that pleased him most was the fact that the whole thing was so fresh in her mind. It was possible that even now she might be won by him. He answered her last question:

"I did think of suicide—but I gave the idea up. There is too much in life to live for; there are too many changes of luck, too many opportunities to win in the end what was refused them at the beginning——"

"Oh, no—no! Do not think that you can ever win my love!"

"But, Miss Burroughs, I did not come here to win your love. You may remember that when we parted you assured me that you had a great respect for me, and that you hoped you would see me often—in fact—er—I believe you said—er—that you would be a sister to me, or something like that—and I have no intention of compelling you to receive my unwelcome attentions."

"But you love me?"

"Well, I—er—I——"

"You must love me."

"It shall be just as you say."

"I do not mean that either. You would not have acted as you did unless you loved me."

"Well, I'll acknowledge" (he was getting just a little tender now) "I do love you. I've tried to forget you, but couldn't."

"You haven't had a very long time to try to forget."

"It has seemed very long indeed to me."

"Yes, it has to me, too. I have been sitting here at this window crying ever since."

This was a stunner. Sitting there crying ever since? Was it possible, or was the girl crazy? He never solved the question. The girl continued:

"But I do not love you, and, no matter what papa and mamma say, I will never marry you. I have never told you the reason why. I'll tell you now; I love another."

"Another?"

"Yes, and have for a long time; and I never expect to see him again, for I sent him away, and he may be dead now, poor fellow. I thought it would be fun to reject him, and I really didn't know how much I cared for him—and then I thought he wouldn't take 'no' for an answer. But oh! he did, and I have been the most miserable girl in the world ever since. I love him—I love him—I love him, and he ought to have sense enough to know it."

She broke into sobs, burying her head—a quivering mass of disordered hair—in her hands.

"Then it has always been quite a hopeless case, so far as I am concerned?"

"Yes."

"Well, let me show you how bravely I can stand it. Let me be a brother to you. Tell me who it is. I'll go to him and bring him back to you. I have an idea that he will be very glad to come, whoever he is."

"No" (with a shake of her head), "he is too proud. He will never come back to me."

"Tell me who he is."

"You know him."

"Well?"

"He is Mr. John Barry, and is in the Army. You remember him at the seaside two years ago."

Jack pinched himself to discover whether he was awake or dreaming. He felt like shouting, but concluded that it wouldn't be quite the correct thing. He wanted to laugh with happiness, but he couldn't laugh while she was crying there in the corner. He saw it all now. She thought she was talking to some other fellow whom she had refused just before. Finally he said, though:

"Yes, I know him very well; but he, too, has changed."

"In what way?" she asked anxiously.

"Well, his voice has changed, too."

"That's nothing. I don't care how he has changed, if he only loves me as he used to."

"He does; and, by the way, his voice is very much like mine now."

It was not the words he had used, but the tone of voice in which he had spoken them that gave her woman's intuition the spur. She looked quickly up. He was standing now where she could catch the outlines of his figure. She uttered a little exclamation, and—well, this is the end of the story.

T. W. H.

WHAT IS THE "G. D."?

It doesn't stand for a "good deal," and yet there is a good deal in what it does stand for.

It doesn't stand for "Giant Despair," though some editors we know will be giants of despair when they see what it does mean.

It doesn't stand for "Good Day," though it will be a good day for you when you know what it does stand for.

Then what is the "G. D."?

See Next Week's SHORT STORIES.

"In the Gloaming, O My Darling," tell me what the "G. D. is."

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TOLD "OFF DUTY."

THE PASSINGHAM PAPERS.

Told by THE COMMISSIONAIRE.

ONE of the best-dressed, most gentlemanly men in the "Stand-Easy" is Harvey Rees. To see him on Saturday nights, in frock-coat (the left sleeve pinned, empty, to his breast), well-fitting trousers, and "patents," you would never associate him with the "Corps of Commissionaires."

And yet is he an especially smart member of that useful public body, and may be seen any day standing, courteous and attentive, in the outer lobby of the greatest of West-end universal stores.

He is a man approaching his half-century, and respected alike by his employers (with whom he has been for a number of years now) and by all, without exception, of his fellow "Stand-Easy's."

When requisitioned, as he was one Saturday night lately, for a yarn, he at once, with military precision, assented, and began.

"It's some time ago now" said he, "that the thing happened, that, in a pecuniary sense at least, may be said to have made me.

"Most of you know the scene of my daily duties—Harpers' Stores—although you would never imagine that there could be a romantic side to the life of a Commissionaire, in that position.

"Such an idea would be a big mistake, as the story I am going to relate will conclusively prove.

"It was a blazing hot afternoon in August, two years ago; and 'Harpers' was doing a roaring trade.

"I always have my work cut out at such times; what with calling and attending cabs; keeping an eye on suspicious characters; and helping helpless ladies; but this day in particular I was fairly run off my feet.

"I can't quite recollect, but I think it was a late-season sale; and you all know how, in such circumstances, the ladies (bless 'em) will run half over London bargain-hunting. If they only knew, they wouldn't do it, for in nine cases out of ten (I speak by the card) the bargain isn't a bargain after all.

"Well, about half-past three, a single-horse brougham drove up to my entrance, and a lady of, I should say, sixty years, white-haired, and in half-mourning, descended from it.

"I thought she looked curiously at me as she passed, making, as she did, a half-hesitating pause, as if almost inclined to speak.

"She even turned her head when within the glass doors, stared intently at me for a minute, and then went about her business. For the moment I was puzzled, for I seemed to know her face.

"'She's wonderfully like what Mrs. Passingham, Captain Passingham's wife, would be now,' said I to myself. 'And yet it can't be her. This one's too old besides—there! I'm an idiot! it can't be her!'

"But it was. The bustle was paralyzing; (it always is at its height between four and five, afternoons; specially at sale times); and I was standing arguing a point with an exasperating old lady, who didn't know her own mind; and expected me to supply the deficiency.

"'Is not your name Rees, Harvey Rees?'

"I righted-about-face like a shot, and there was my puzzle again, with a smile on the sweetest of old faces it has ever been my lot to look upon.

"'Yes, madam,' I respectfully answered her, and giving her a salute, 'and I think, asking your pardon for taking the liberty, that you are——?'

"'Mrs. Passingham, Rees; don't you remember—my husband, Captain Hugh, and the little bungalow at Simla?'

"'Yes, madam, well; and I'm pleased, indeed, to see you again, that I am!'

"'Why, you look just the same, Rees—not a bit altered—not a day older. But I forget, your arm! where did you lose your arm?'

"'In Burmah, ma'am, after I left the Captain for active service. But I hope he's all right—the Captain I mean?'

"'No, Rees, that's my trouble; he died this time last year, on the very day that he was gazetted Colonel of the old regiment.'

"'Forgive me, ma'am!' I said hurriedly, 'I am sorry—for you, and for myself, too, for he was the best master officer's servant ever had!'

"'I'm glad, Rees, to hear you say that of him. But I must run away now, or 'Harpers'' will be finding fault with me for taking up your time.'

"Just as I turned the carriage-door handle, she leant forward, and said:

"'Oh, Rees! something has just struck me. Are your evenings free?'

"I said that they were.

"Ever of Thee I'm Fondly Dreaming," and thinking about the "G. D."

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"'Well, here is my card; come and see me to-morrow evening after dinner, about nine. There is a matter I should like to talk over with you. Will you come?'

"I said that of course I would.

"When she had gone I was more in a fog than ever as to what it all meant.

"What on earth could she want with me?

"When I told the wife about it she soon settled things—to her own satisfaction.

"'Don't bother your head!' she summed up. 'What ever it is you'll know to-morrow evening, and all the worrying in the world won't hasten your knowing by so much as one minute.'

"True enough! But all the same I couldn't help worrying, and, as a matter of fact, did worry during the interval, till I got quite feverish and out of sorts.

"It'll help you to understand better what followed if I go back a little.

"When I enlisted in the —th Regiment, ordered for India, Captain Passingham was in command of the company to which I was intimately attached.

"From the first I liked him, and was fortunate enough myself to gain his goodwill and approval.

"This resulted, in no long time, in my getting appointed his servant, much to my satisfaction.

"He had married just before I joined, his wife and he being a perfect pair—no nonsense about them. They had thought for others, which, as a rule, officers and their wives (specially the wives) haven't—in India, at any rate.

"Of course, I was the envy of the whole regiment; it was only natural. There wasn't a man that wouldn't have grovelled in the dust for the privilege of cleaning young Mrs. Passingham's boots, the Captain, too, being, with all alike, as popular as it was possible for an officer to be.

"By-and-bye a little family came along—two boys and a girl, but the girl died when a baby.

"I got on first-rate with them all, and taught the young gentlemen, I believe (at least up to the time when they left India for England to be educated) everything in the shape of sport and athletics.

"They could, both of them, ride, box, swim, play cricket, and do a dozen other things before they were, each of them, six years old, and that they got it all in the first instance from me, I'm more proud of to-day than of anything else in the whole wide world.

"It was only a week or two before the young Passinghams sailed for home that an incident occurred which might have had disastrous issues.

"There was a small detachment of sepoys (part of a native regiment) in cantonment, one of whom, Lal-Singh, bore a somewhat indifferent character.

"Sullen, vindictive, cunning, he was at once a terror to his more orderly comrades, and a perpetual source of anxiety and worry to the military authorities.

"It remained, however, for me to be the indirect means of his final exit from the service.

"On a certain morning I had arranged with Master Hugh, the eldest boy, to give him a last swimming lesson.

"The place selected was our usual practice water while in the hills, viz., an old and ruinous tank in a side-hollow of the road leading down to the valley.

"Master Hugh was disporting himself to his heart's content, myself superintending operations; Cecil, meanwhile, playing merrily about the edge of the cistern, and occasionally, with a laugh and a shout throwing light missiles at his brother.

"Suddenly I was startled by a loud 'whiz' over my head, followed by a tremendous splash in the water, close to the boy's head.

"'Rees! Rees!' cried out Master Hugh. 'Lal-Singh threw a big brick at me, and he's running away!'

"I turned like a tiger, and was after him before he could reach the belt of cypress that fringed three sides of the little copse.

"He could run, and—so could I. Finding, though, that he had too great a start of me, I tried his own tactics, and hurled at him, with all my strength, the heavy stick I carried; with such unerring aim, that it struck him full and fair on the back of the head.

"He fell like a log.

"Calling out to the boys to come on at once, I secured my prisoner by binding his ankles with my waistbelt; and his arms behind him with his own; and left him lying there on his face, for the guard to fetch him.

"It seems that Captain Passingham had had reason to complain of Lal-Singh to the Commander of the native troops.

"Severely punished, the sepoy vowed revenge; and finding his opportunity in the lad Hugh's defenceless position in the water, he took cowardly and murderous advantage of it.

"He was not only cashiered, but was tried by the Civil power for the outrage and sentenced to a long term in the Andamans.

"I stayed with the Captain for some time after this, till, in fact, I volunteered for Burmah, from which time, to the day I saw Mrs. Passingham at Harpers', I lost sight of the family altogether.

"I may say that the Captain was particularly well-off, inheriting, as he did at an early age, a fortune, so I heard, of something like eight thousand a year from his father, besides a lovely place in Norfolk, not far from Sandringham.

"So much for reminiscence.

"According to agreement I was at Mrs. Passingham's, Lennox Gardens, S.W., next evening, and was at once shown up to her.

"She was alone, and there it was that I saw how marvellously like she yet was to the Mrs. Passingham of old days. Spite the white hair, the signs of age, there was still the same kindly, winning smile, the same gracious gentleness of manner.

"The story she had to tell me was sad in the extreme.

"Briefly, it was this:

"It was the Captain's one great desire that both his sons should follow a military career. The younger, Cecil, fell in at once with the idea; but Hugh, the first-born, the heir, while not definitely dissenting, showed a manifest reluctance to comply with his father's wishes.

"Then came trouble of quite another kind.

"The elder son, having completed his education at Eton and kept one term at Oxford, returned to India on a visit to his parents; leaving his brother to pursue his military studies at Sandhurst.

"Strange to say, from the moment he set foot in Calcutta up to my interview with his mother in Lennox Gardens, nothing more was seen of him. He vanished utterly and completely.

"It was heard, however, that, on arrival at the seat of Government, he had called upon his father's agents, drawn the amount (not inconsiderable) placed with them

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to his son's credit by Captain Passingham, and—disappeared.

"Within a week his mother received a letter from him by 'dak' messenger. It contained no address, and was not even dated.

"Its purport was that while in England he had become sincerely attached to a certain young lady—a prominent member of a well-known theatrical company. That company having made Calcutta a temporary stopping-place in a tour round the world, he had taken the opportunity of his sweetheart's presence there, and married her. Whither they were bound he did not explain. (Subsequent inquiries revealed that the actress in question had seceded from the troupe immediately after the marriage.) He knew, he said, that his father would never forgive him for what he had done, and for his refusal to adopt a military life. His musical abilities would, he imagined (he was a fine musician, a genius some said who ought to know) find bread for him and her.

As for his inheritance, let Cecil have it, if its assumption was to be coupled with, for him, Hugh, impossible conditions, he would none of it. Even that part of it which was entailed he renounced absolutely.

He was grieved, he added, if in all this he vexed his mother, and made her to sorrow for him, and on his account, but seeing that the irrevocable step had been taken, and, that, had it been even otherwise, family discord would inevitably have resulted, it was best that things should be as they were. He should always love her, his beautiful, darling mother, but she would doubtless have good consolation in Cecil's loyalty and affection.

"That was the last from or of him.

"Captain, or rather Colonel Passingham's death put a different and more complicated complexion on matters, and this, in connection with a recent unexpected communication from the family solicitor, Mr. Powell, made the still mourning mother to emerge from her despair, and to rouse herself to action.

"Mr. Powell's news, brief and to the point, was to the following effect:

"At the Home for Asiatics in the West India Dock Road, a certain Hindoo, calling himself Lal-Singh had, during the previous week, succumbed to the fatal influence of the English climate.

"Taken to the hospital, where he actually died, there was found, on searching his clothing, a letter, bearing the signature of Hugh Passingham, and dated but a couple of months back from a house in Montgomery Street, San Francisco.

"It was a curt reply to an application of the addressor for aid in distress. How Lal-Singh had discovered the writer's whereabouts is unknown, and that his idea was simple mendicity is doubtful. Anyway, without suspecting the applicant's identity with his sometime assailant and would-be murderer, Hugh Passingham inclosed a dollar and—thought no more of it.

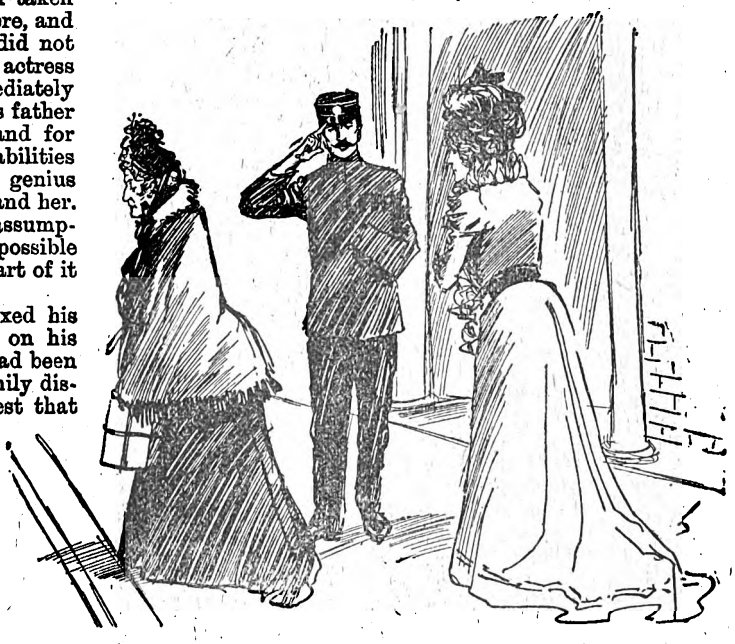
"'Now,' said Mrs. Passingham, 'I have my reasons, best known to myself, for not being too confidential with Mr. Powell in this matter and for not telling him exactly all that I mean to do in the circumstances. I always trusted you, Rees, in the days when you served my husband, and for that matter, me, so faithfully. I am about to renew that trust in a way that will enable you to be of great service to me, and, all being well, to benefit yourself.'

"'I shall be only too happy, ma'am,' I said, 'to help you in any way I can, both for your own and the Captain's sake.'

"'Well, then, Rees, I am about, without saying a word to anybody beyond yourself, to sail to California, and to bring back my boy—if I can.'

"'Yes,' I said, 'I see, but——'

"'Wait a moment,' she interrupted me. 'There are some papers—important papers—in my possession,



"Is not your name Rees, Harvey Rees?"

which it is not expedient should be seen by anyone except my son Hugh. These I do not think it wise to take with me, in case of anything befalling me by the way. So I have decided to intrust them to you, to be kept by you until I or Mr. Hugh demand them of you.

"'I may say at once that they are not strictly legal documents, but private papers and memoranda left by my husband in my hands for transmission to our son if he could ever be found.'

"I left Lennox Gardens that night with the packet in my possession, and I can safely say that from the moment when I placed it in my inner breast pocket to the day when I gave it up to its rightful owner I never knew the blessedness of peace of mind.

"I got a line from Mrs. Passingham from Liverpool on the eve of her sailing, and another from New York just as she was about to start on her long railway trip across the great continent.

"I heard nothing more for nearly three months; then, one afternoon, about five, a man servant brought me a note. It was from Mrs. Passingham herself, and dated from Lennox Gardens.

"'Will Harvey Rees call here to-night at nine o'clock and *bring the packet with him.*'

You will see it in "Short Stories" next week.

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"Poor lady! She left England hopeful, full of anticipation, and she returned—desolate.

"And yet not quite so.

"On reaching San Francisco, she had no difficulty in tracing her son.

"But it was to find him on his death-bed. Late hours, as pianist at a fourth-rate variety theatre had told upon a never very strong constitution.

She took it from me, walked over to the fire, and seemed about to drop it into the glowing coals.

"He knew her, and she says that that last hour in the company of her boy, was at once the sweetest and the most sorrowful of her life.

"She buried him, having with her own hands closed his eyes.

"'Rees,' she said, after she had finished telling me everything; 'give me the packet.'

"She took it from me; walked over to the fire, and seemed about to drop it into the glowing coals.

"A rushing blaze and flare; a few powdery cinders; and the secret that I had guarded for the past three months so carefully, would have remained a secret for ever.

"What it was that influenced Mrs. Passingham to delay the deed I most certainly do not know; neither does she, I think, quite know herself.

"Mere curiosity it was not, for she was not the sort of woman who would be inclined to give way to that feminine failing. It must have been an instructive belief in her own mind that this paper, or set of papers would right a wrong; or would at least bring out into free light and air, that which had languished for so long in the shadow and suffocation of misunderstanding and neglect.

"If I am right in my last alternative, then was the result a wonderful, if tardy, rendering of justice to (while he lived) a very unhappy man, and a bringing of great peace to the mother that bore him, and who mourned him, as only such mothers can and do mourn the sons of their love.

"'Rees!' said Mrs. Passingham, when she had seated herself again, the packet still unopened in her lap, 'Rees! I don't know why I confide in you as I do. I suppose it is because I believe you to be faithful and true, and also because I have, though possessing many acquaintances, no real friends.'

"'Madam,' I said, 'I am only too proud of the honour of your confidence and esteem; though I assure you that you greatly overestimate any good qualities I may possess.'

"'I am content to abide by my own judgment,' she answered, sadly smiling the while, 'and so, Harvey Rees, you, who knew and loved both my dear husband, and my dear son, shall share with me, here and now, whatever secret this packet contains.'

"It was with the greatest calmness, and with the steadiest of fingers, that the beautiful old lady broke the seal.

"From out of the cover there fluttered on to the ground quite a dozen and a half closely written sheets of manuscript.

"I stooped and picked them up, and handed them back to her. She just put them in their proper order, and within half-an-hour I had become the depositary of a family secret, at once eminently sad and touching.

"As I am, for obvious reasons, using fictitious names throughout this narration (although Mrs. Passingham is now herself dead, having survied her husband scarcely two years), it will manifestly hurt nobody if I give a brief account of that which I heard from the lips of my old mistress, as she read out the paper to me that night.

"The document (for it was in reality but one) set out

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by asking pardon of his absent son, should he ever see this confession, for any harshness he, his father, may have shown towards him in connection with his matrimonial folly.

"There was much self-abasement, and pathetic contrition, which certainly would not interest you, as it would not be seemly or generous were I to repeat it.

"The main point of all was this: That the captain (his promotion counts as nothing with me), after an especially extensive sowing of wild oats, fell in love with the leading actress at London's most fashionable theatre. Long and ardently he wooed her, to be in the end successful.

"But he made the mistake so many men of position make when taking a wife from the stage. He failed altogether to appreciate, or comprehend her; while she, living in an entirely different, because an artificial world, was first impatient, and then utterly discontented.

"What the result would have been had she lived is not difficult of understanding. The practical and immediate results were for a time, at any rate, disastrous, (with regard to Captain Hugh), involving, as they did, the alienation of his family.

"That there had been no really overmastering love is evident in that when, six years after, he met the Mrs. Passingham I knew and revered, he acknowledged to having found his ruby of rubies.

"The lengthy manuscript concluded with an ardent prayer that he might be permitted to see his son's face again, and if that might not be, then that son would forgive his father for having blindly forgotten how that he, too, had been through the fire.

"I looked for Mrs. Passingham to be sorely distressed by this revelation of her dead husband's secretiveness and unnecessary hard dealing with their son.

"But she was not as most women are. Hurt she may —she must have been; but she did not let me perceive it; her first words upon laying down the last sheet being:

"'Thank Heaven, that his heart was at least toward his son, and the boy—he knows—he knows—now!'

"Yet again, a few days afterwards, I called upon her at her request. I saw, as I entered the drawing-room, a tall, slight, dark young lady, sitting quietly in the shadow of a great screen.

"There was just the ghost of her old smile in Mrs. Passingham's eyes, as she said to me:

"'Rees, this young lady, who is she like?'

"The girl now came forward and stood by the elder lady's side.

"'Like ma'am!' I said. 'Why, like Mr. Hugh, if I may say so. Yes, it's young master over again in—in——'

"'You're right, Rees! you're right!' cried the old lady, immensely pleased. 'Anita is certainly her father over again; and now that she is to live with me, I am glad, very glad, Rees, that things are as they are.'

"I could see what she meant; for it was with a great, deep, sigh that she said this; while it was quite clear to me that relief, intense relief was at the bottom of it—and, for her sake I too was glad.

"I have only to add, that the day Mr. Cecil came into what was now absolutely his own, I received a deed conferring upon me an annuity, far in excess of my deserts; and which, with my pension, and my wages at Harpers', makes me to-day independent of the world, for as long as I shall live."

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Dr. SELSAM'S EXPERIMENT.

It was late in the afternoon of September that I called to see my old friend and comrade, Dr. Selsam, Professor of Pathology, etc. I found him alone in his magnificent library on the Bergstrasse, his elbows on a small marble table in front of him, and his eyes fixed on a crystal globe, whih seemed to contain nothing but clear water.

He seemed so deeply absorbed that I was on the point of withdrawing without disturbing his contemplations, when a big footman, whom I had passed snoring in the ante-chamber, suddenly woke up, and in stentorian tones announced "Mr. Theodore Kilrain."

Selsam drew a long breath, and slowly turned towards me, like an automatum, saying:

"Ah, is that you, Theodore?"

"Yes," I replied; "but what are you doing? Are you studying the elixir of life?"

I was quite taken aback by the scowl my words brought to his face.

"Theodore," he said, after a moment's pause, "this is no time for jesting. I am studying the malady of your respected aunt, Dame Hannah Wandulich. What you told me of her yesterday is very serious, particularly her exaggerated expressions in speaking of music, her ecstacies, her exultations—all are symptoms of a dangerous disease."

"And were you trying to find the solution to her malady in that bowl of water?"

"Even so, and it is a most fortunate chance that brought you here. I was just wishing for you." Pointing to a violin on the wall, he continued: "Will you be kind enough to play me one of Mozart's sonatas?"

The request was so unexpected, so singular, that I thought my friend's head had gone astray as well as my Aunt Hannah's. Divining my thoughts, he answered them, and with an ironical smile, said:

"Reassure yourself, Theodore, reassure yourself. My intellectual faculties are all right. I am on the road to making a grand—a sublime discovery."

At this I took down the violin, and began to examine it with an envious eye. It was one of those incomparable instruments which Frederick the Second had ordered to be manufactured for his special flute accompaniments.

I had scarcely touched the bow to the strings when I forgot my surroundings, forgot everything, in the beauty of the music and the pure tones of the violin. With my hat on the floor and my eyes closed, I was in the seventh heaven of delight.

How long this lasted I know not. When I awoke, as from a dream, I found myself lying on the Doctor's sofa wondering what had happened. In a weak voice I said:

"Well, Selsam, are you satisfied?"

Armed with a magnifying-glass, he was carefully examining his globe. The water had become turbid. Thousands of "infusoria" were crossing and re-crossing each other in every direction. Selsam's face was radiant with delight. Rushing towards me and grasping both hands, he enthusiastically explained:

"Thanks, thanks, my dear friend and comrade—a thousand thanks! You have just rendered an immense service to science."

I was amazed. How could my playing be a service to science? Selsam continued:

"My dear Theodore, I will not leave you in ignorance of the glorious part which you have played in the solution of this great problem. Come, follow me, and you shall see and understand all."

As the night had come on he lighted a silver lamp, and, opening a side door, motioned me to follow him. I was a prey to the most profound emotions as I walked through the long suite of rooms. I felt as if a revolution were going to be accomplished in my whole being. Perhaps I was about to receive the key to the invisible world.

The lamp threw a silvery light on the magnificent appointments of this sumptuous dwelling. Rich curtains, carpets, ornaments, and statuary were pictured in its softened radiance. Finally we reached the top of a broad staircase. We descended into an inner court, our footsteps waking mysterious echoes.

There were several doors in this court. Selsam stopped before one and said:

"This is my dissecting-room. Don't be alarmed. Nature never yields her most precious secrets but through the hands of Death."

I went to turn back, but Selsam had already entered, and I was compelled to follow. To my horror I saw a corpse—the corpse of a young man—lying on a long, oaken table. The head was thrown back. The eyes were wide open. On the breast was a deep incision. But what impressed me most was not the wound, nor the sombre look of the dead body; it was the immobility—the utter death-like silence.

"Is this eternal annihilation?" I asked myself.

"No," answered Selsam, who seemed to see the thoughts coming and going in my brain. "No; it is the birth of a thousand lives. Myriads enslaved by one force are going to be set free by this change. That force—that will—was *here*."

He struck the head; it gave forth a hollow, wooden sound. Then he plunged his scalpel into the corpse. I started back in horror. He did not even notice the movement, but continued calmly talking.

"Do you see these little, white fibres running in every direction? These are the nerves, the messengers carrying orders from the 'central molecule' to the extremities. Here are the organs of respiration—the lungs. Here of circulation—the heart, the veins, the arteries. Here of digestion; and each one has its separate molecules. But in life our welfare and comfort depend in a great measure upon our treatment of these infinitesimal creatures. They govern our organism."

"Then," I exclaimed, "where is our liberty? If I am the slave of infinitesimal molecules, how can I be held responsible for my actions?"

To this Selsam answered: "One molecule of my body can rebel against my whole being—often does, but then it perishes, takes the consequence of its own act. In the same way you are free. You can rebel against the laws of nature, misapply the power you have over the beings of which you are composed, and thus cause your own dissolution."

I could find no answer to this argument, and stood looking at him in breathless stupefaction. At last I said:

"All this sounds very logical, and no doubt is a beautiful theory, but I fail to see what relation it has to

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your globe of water, my venerable aunt's illness, and the music you requested me to play?"

"Nothing is plainer," Selsam answered with a smile. "You certainly know that the vibrations of a sound will set in motion grains of sand placed on the top of a drum, and cause them to form into geometrical figures of wonderful regularity."

"Yes," I replied, "but——"

"But," he impatiently exclaimed, "hear me out. In the same way in which that sound affects the molecules of water, the 'infusoria' that you saw in my globe, just so music acts upon the liquids of the body, bringing into existence infinitesimal animated beings endowed with emotion. This is what physicians call 'equivocal evolution.'

"You must also know that wave sounds act upon the nervous system, and produce electricity. This in turn engenders thousands of millions of insects in our bodies, which attack our organs, and cause all the countless diseases which flesh is heir to, the nature of which has hitherto been unknown, but my discovery makes it all clear.

"It shows they are caused by these animalcules—namely, the 'myriapoda,' which have six feet, but no wings; the 'thysanoptera,' whose abdomen and sides are covered with myriads of incomplete legs; the 'parasites,' with round eyes and mouths like suction pumps; the 'coleoptera,' the 'tepidoptera,' the 'hymenoptera,' and millions of 'rodentia,' which invade the body, devour it with their teeth, and gnaw it with their claws until it is like an old, worm-eaten log, dried up and withered—all the blood gone to feed and enrich the 'ascarides.'"

Selsam's description actually made my hair stand on end.

"And do you believe," I exclaimed, "that music—that sound can cause all these disasters?"

"Without the shadow of a doubt," he replied. "You have only to look at the old, withered up musicians, or at your venerable aunt, to be convinced. There is but one remedy for that unfortunate dame, but one that can cure her."

"What is that, Selsam? I am her heir, it is true, but it would be a terrible weight on my conscience if I left anything untried which could save her life."

"Yes, I recognise the natural delicacy of your feelings. It is affection, and not interest, that prompts you. But it is getting late. I have just heard the midnight bell. Come to-morrow night at ten and I will have the remedy ready, the only one that can save your Aunt Hannah. I shall cure her, you may rest assured. I give you my professional word on it."

With that he opened a door leading from the court into the Bergstrasse. We shook hands, and I repaired to my room, a prey to the most painful reflections.

"Great Heavens," I thought, "it is a lucky man who can find the remedy that will cure without killing the 'central molecule.'"

That night at supper, which I took alone with my good aunt, I watched her with a heart full of tender compassion.

"Alas!" I mused, "what would you say, my poor Aunt Wandulich, if you knew the millions of ferocious little beasts which are now devouring you as you quietly sip your tea?"

"What makes you look at me in that peculiar way, Theodore?" she inquired anxiously.

"Oh, nothing, nothing!" I answered.

"Yes, it is something. You think I am worse. Do I look ill?"

"It is true, aunt, you are a little pale. You have received some new music lately, have you not?"

"Yes, I received the score of a new opera yesterday."

"I knew it, my dear aunt. You have spent the whole day at your piano, interpreting, going into ecstacies."

She turned scarlet.

"What does this mean, sir? Is it your business? Haven't I the right to?"

"Certainly you have the right, my dear aunt, only it is suicidal. You are ruining your nervous system."

"Nervous fiddlesticks! You don't know what you are talking about! You are crazy!"

"For goodness' sake, aunt, calm yourself. Anger produces electricity, which acts on the body, engendering millions of insects."

"Insects!" she screamed, bounding to her feet. "Did you ever see any insects on me, sir? How dare you insult me! Insects! insects! Katrina! Louisa! Bring me my smelling-salts, quick! Leave the room, sir!"

"But, aunt——!" I stammered.

"Leave the room, sir! I will disinherit you! You have insulted me!"

She shrieked. She raged. Her false front slipped to one side. Her cap fell over her ear. It was a frightful scene. Getting up and going to her, I exclaimed:

"My dear aunt, do be calm. I am not speaking of the insects you think of, but of the 'myriapoda,' 'coleoptera,' 'hymenoptera,' 'thysanoptera,' the countless army of microscopic monsters which have invaded your body and are devouring you by piecemeal."

At this my venerable Aunt Wandulich fell back in a dead swoon, her arms limp, her face as pale as death, and the paint on her cheeks showing like two spots of blood.

I was out of the house in two seconds. I rushed to my friend, Dr. Selsam, as livid as a corpse, crying: "The crisis has come!"

There I stopped. I was in the midst of a large company assembled in the doctor's library. There was Daniel Bremen, the keeper of the Archæological Museum, with his powdered wig, round face, and frog-like eyes. He was holding a gigantic horn to his lips, and seemed to be showing the company how to use it.

There was Chapel-Master Hoffer, doubled up in a big chair, and with his long legs stuck under the table, busy examining some queer-looking instrument. Kaspar Hansbrick, the Curator of the Hospital, and Dr. Heilsman, the Dean of the Faculty, were also there in their dress coats and white cravats. One of them was armed with what seemed an immense bronze waiter, the other with a gigantic drum covered with goat-skin.

These persons, seated round the library table, made such a grotesque picture, with their puffed-out cheeks and round, protruding eyes that I stood transfixed to the threshold with outstretched hand and gaping mouth.

Dr. Selsam gravely motioned me to a seat, while the keeper of the Museum, Daniel Bremen, went on with his explanations.

"This, gentlemen," he said, "is the famous 'buscia-tibia' of the Swiss. It has terrific power, capable of drowning the roar of the loudest cataract. If Mr. Kilrain will use it, I have no doubt he will produce a great effect."

On saying this, he placed the horn in my hand, and, turning to Kaspar Hansbrick, said:

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"Your drum is the most wonderful ever invented. It is the karabo of the Egyptians. The Abyssinians used it in all their martial music. You, Dean Heilsman, have only to strike on this waiter from time to time. It is the celebrated 'tom-tom,' whose lugubrious sound resembles the tolling of our great cathedral bell. In the silence of the night it will have a magnificent effect. Are you ready, gentlemen? Do you understand?"

"Perfectly," they all exclaimed.

"Then let us go."

"Wait a moment," said Dr. Selsam, "until I explain my remedy to my friend Theodore. My dear friend, the condition of your respected aunt requires heroic treatment. After long meditation and research a luminous idea has struck me. Your aunt is suffering from weakness of the nervous system caused by the excessive use of music. Now, my remedy is to combine the Hippocrates treatment of 'contraries are cured by contraries' wth the teachings of our immortal Hahnemann 'like cures like.' Nothing can be more unlike the sickly sentimental opera of the present day than the wild music of the Africans.

"Therefore, I have borrowed their musical instruments, and intend to treat your aunt with a Hottentot symphony, and thus the principle of 'contraries are cured by contraries' will be complied with. On the other hand, nothing is more like music than music itself. So you will see, the theory 'like cures like' will also be complied with. The idea seems to me sublime."

"Selsam," I cried, "you are a man of genius. Hippocrates advanced the thesis, Hahnemann the antithesis, but you have created the synthesis. It is a grand discovery."

"Yes," he modestly answered; "but allow me to finish. Consequently, I applied to Dr. Bremen, the keeper of the Museum, who not only lent me the tom-tom, the bisca-tibia, and karabo from his collection, but volunteered to play on the Hottentot fife, which will be a valuable addition to our improvised orchestra."

I made a low bow to the keeper of the Museum, and expressed my deep gratitude. He seemed much moved, and said:

"Sir, I am happy to be of service to you and your venerable aunt, Dame Wandulich, whose numerous virtues have been obscured by her unhappy exaggeration of music. May we bring her back to the simple taste of our forefathers."

"Yes, I pray we may succeed," I cried most fervently.

"Let us go, gentlemen—let us go," said Dr. Selsam.

We proceeded down the grand stairway into the Bergstrasse. It was now eleven o'clock. The night was dark; not a single star shone in the great canopy above us. The weather-vanes screeched in the wintry winds, the lights on the lamp-posts burned with fitful gleams, as we glided through the streets, keeping close to the walls like so many assassins, our instruments concealed under our cloaks.

When we arrived at my aunt's, I noiselessly turned the key in the lock. Then we cautiously entered the vestibule, and by the light of a wax taper Selsam had brought with him, we ascended the stairs, and took our places opposite my aunt's bedroom, our instruments ready, waiting for the Doctor's signal. Nothing stirred in the house; it was wrapped in profound silence. Selsam raised his hand.

"Commence."

My horn, the tom-tom, the karabo, the fife, all started at the same time. Great Heavens, no words can convey an idea of that savage music. I felt as if the roof would surely be carried off. We heard a wild shriek; but, far from stopping, a kind of rage seemed to possess us. The drum, the tom-tom, the fife, went on with renewed vigour—such a terrific noise.

I could no longer hear my horn, although it was capable of drowning the crashing of thunder. But the tom-tom was the wildest, maddest of all. Its lugubrious vibrations aroused a sense of terror, a feeling as if a cannibal banquet were being prepared, and you were to be served as the roast. My hair stood on end. Twenty times Selsam shouted to us to stop. We were deaf, carried away by a kind of diabolical frenzy.

At last, exhausted, out of breath, scarcely able to stand, we were forced to stop our infernal concert. Selsam, putting his finger to his lips, said "Hush! —listen!" But our ears were buzzing so we could scarcely have heard the shriek of a locomotive.

After waiting a few minutes, the Doctor grew uneasy, and softly entered my aunt's bedroom to learn the effect of his remedy. He stayed so long that I was on the point of following him, when he came out exceedingly pale, and giving us a strange, startled look, said:

"Gentlemen, let's go home."

"But what is the result of the experiment?" I cried, catching hold of his arm.

He turned round and slowly answered: "The result—your venerable aunt is dead."

"Dead?" I exclaimed, starting back.

"Yes, the electrical commotion was too strong, too violent. It destroyed her 'ascerides,' but unfortunately killed the central molecule. That does not, however, disprove my theory in the least. Your aunt is dead, but she died cured of her disease."

With that he walked out. We silently followed him, pale with fright, and separated without a word. The conclusion of the affair had terrified us.

On the next day the whole town knew that Dame Hannah Wandulich was dead—that she had died suddenly in the night. There was some talk among the neighbours of a terrible, frightful noise they had heard, but it was attributed to a violent thunderstorm. No one paid any attention to it, and we escaped without the slightest suspicion. Besides, Dr. Selsam was called in to decide the cause of death. He declared that Dame Hannah had been carried off by a stroke of apoplexy, superinduced by cerebal excitement.

Six months after this event he published a book on the cure of "Helminthiasis" by music. It had an immense success, a world-wide reputation. The Emperor decorated him with the "Cross of the Black Vulture." The Empress deigned to congratulate him in person. He was elected President of the National Society of Science. In short, he is now a very celebrated man.

As for me, I shall never cease to reproach myself for contributing to my poor aunt's death by blowing on that infernal horn; but I take Heaven to witness I never thought of hurting her. The idea of killing her central molecule by electricity never entered my brain.

In truth, I confess to my shame, that if anyone had told me that music—even a Hottentot symphony—could have killed a fly I should have laughed in their face.

But now, since the wonderful discovery of Dr. Selsam, I deplore my ignorance. It breaks my heart to think my dear Aunt Wandulich was his first victim.

M. E B.

"Maxwellton Braes are Bonnie." The "G. D." is—well, see next week's "Short Stories."

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The Story of a Photograph.

ARTHUR STANTON, although only thirty, was regarded as a confirmed bachelor, much to the vexation of certain elderly ladies in his circle of society.

He had inherited a large fortune, was handsome and fond of gaiety; he was decidedly a good match, from the point of view of these ladies, and yet they had not the least doubt that he was hopeless so far as matrimony was concerned.

He was constantly invited to all kinds of social functions and readily accepted such invitations; he was in every respect a ladies' man, but no member of the opposite sex seemed able to make the least impression upon him.

He was proof against pleasant smiles and tender glances—in short, proof against the arrows of Cupid. He was a flirt of the finest water.

He kept a handsome house, and loved to invite a select company of us to spend an evening with him, or we would have a drive on a coach or otherwise amuse ourselves. It was always a jolly party, and I am afraid that we were voted "wild" by our relations and acquaintances.

Stanton was wont to sneer at love, he said there was no such thing as loving one woman, but that you must love them all. If you had heard him talk on this subject as I have, you would have entertained the same notion as the rest of his friends, namely, that it was a simple impossibility for him to fall in love as that expression is commonly understood.

One evening we were spending an hour or two as the guests of Stanton in his town house. By "we," I mean half-a-dozen young fellows between twenty-five and thirty. I don't remember exactly what Stanton and the other four were doing at the moment, but Archer was at the piano, rattling over a new piece, and I, lazily smoking a cigarette, was strolling about the room to see if our host had picked up any fresh knick-knack during the past fortnight. In one corner of the room, on a small table, I saw an album, this arrested my attention because I had not seen it before, and I opened it and began to examine portraits and views with careless indifference.

There was nothing to interest me to any great extent, Stanton had dabbled in amateur photography and this album contained some of his work—and it wasn't very good.

I was about to shut up the book when I noticed that two of the leaves remained somewhat apart, as though something had been thrust into the album temporarily or by accident.

Stanton's house was a hall of liberty, and we had no scruples about examining and asking questions concerning anything and everything which came under our notice, so I opened the album at that particular place in order to find out what prevented it from shutting properly.

It was a cabinet photograph of a girl about twenty, so far as I could judge; there was nothing surprising in that, for Stanton had quite a collection, but the astonishing part of it was that the girl there represented was not pretty—to put it roughly, she was decidedly plain—and our host did not, as a rule, preserve photographs of ladies who were scarcely passable. I picked up the picture in order to exhibit it and to ask where he got it, but as I turned it over I saw on the back the inscription: "To my betrothed." And under those words was the name Christine.

I was staggered, simply staggered. This girl called Arthur Stanton her betrothed!

Then it occurred to me that the portrait did not belong to him, so I determined to settle the matter by asking him. If that inscription had really been addressed to him, then we should have some fun, for we would tease him until we found out who she was and where she was living; we should, in addition, feel that he had been duping us and playing the part of a hypocrite.

"Gentlemen," I called out in a tone which drew all eyes towards me and made Archer cease playing, "it will interest you to gaze upon the features of Mr. Arthur Stanton's *fiancée*. Now, Arthur, who is she?—where is she? Out with it, man!"

There was a roar of laughter as he held up the photo, from all except Stanton; he rose slowly from his seat, his face extremely pale and grave, came towards me and took the picture from my hand.

"Gentlemen, don't make fun out of a tragedy. She was my affianced wife!" said Stanton, as, after a look at the picture, he placed it almost reverently in the album.

"It is well that you should know the story since you have found out part of it," he continued, seating himself again and speaking with a gravity which was quite foreign to him. "Perhaps you think me a hypocrite. I deny the charge, but I make no pretence of defending myself. I am satisfied that I live up to my opinions. Listen to the story; it will make a variation on our usual method of passing the time."

There was dead silence; we all felt that we were to hear the broad details of a tragic episode in this man's career, and the mere fact had a sobering effect.

I will give Stanton's narrative in his own words as nearly as I remember them, and I assure you that it made such an impression upon me that my narration must very closely resemble the original.

* * * * *

It is seven years ago. I was studying at Oxford; at least, that is what I was supposed to be doing, but I was

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more bent on pleasure than on the acquisition of knowledge. But we will pass that.

It was well in the autumn, but it was more like a summer. I was quietly reading in my private apartment, when I was disturbed by a knock at the door. Thinking that it was my landlady, I shouted to her to come in, but was startled by the entrance of a middle-aged woman, neatly but poorly dressed, with her bonnet on and a light cape over her shoulders.

I did not relish this visit on the part of a stranger,

It was a cabinet photograph of a girl about twenty.

but I politely, though frigidly, offered her a chair and asked her business. She hesitated for a few seconds, then, recovering her self-control by an evident effort, she began:

"I have come to ask a service, it may seem a great one, but to you it cannot be more than a small service—an easy one.

"I am a widow in very poor circumstances and I have an only child—a daughter—nearly twenty-one. She is my only joy in this world, and—and she is dying!"

Her voice faltered, but she quickly resumed:

"It is one of those wasting diseases. Outwardly there seems to be very little the matter with her, but she is weak, she is getting thinner and thinner, and she is sad—so sad! The doctor has really given her up, he tells me that it is useless to give her medicine, it can do her no good. The only thing that can be done for her is to cause a reaction by making her cheerful. But it is quite unlikely that this will make her better—I am convinced that it will not—but I should like to cheer her last days. That is why I come to you."

I thought I could then see the drift of the visit, the woman wanted pecuniary assistance, so I drew out my purse to give her something and so dismiss her.

"No, no!" said my visitor, shaking her head sadly. "I am asking for alms, but not of that kind. I am asking for the alms of a—lie! I will tell you.

"You are young and full of life, you are fond of pleasure, you are bright and happy. If you would come to my house now and then—I live quite close—and talk a little to my daughter, Christine. You are so bright that it would cheer her up and make her life end less miserably. I have come to ask you to act a lie, to pretend to take an interest in us—in her—and——No, it is not money, I do not plead for your influence to get her into a home, I ask for the alms of a lie!"

"I'm afraid—that is, I can help you with money or anything of that kind," I began to stammer, "but——"

The poor woman cut me short by actually falling on her knees and holding up her hands beseechingly. She seemed to have set her heart on carrying out this plan, and you know that I am always easily touched. I did not like to do it, yet I found it impossible to refuse, and in spite of myself I consented to act this lie.

I will not dwell upon the mother's gratitude, nor upon my own feeling of uneasiness when she was gone. I had pledged myself to carry out this plan, and, although I may not be quite what I ought to be, I always keep my word.

I paid my first visit on the following afternoon. I do not clearly remember the explanation for my appearance which was concocted by the mother and myself, but it was plausible enough and Christine did not doubt it. I found her much as you see her in the photograph, pale, languid and thin, with a sad expression in her eyes and a melancholy smile on her lips. She proved to be, like her mother, tolerably well educated and intelligent, so my task was rendered more easy; I had imagined that I should be compelled to utter a string of wearisome commonplaces and be bored to death even while striving to be gay, but I discovered that she had read a good deal and that she could follow with

"Way Down Upon the Swanee River," they're puzzling over the "G. D."

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interest a sensible conversation on a variety of topics. By the end of the second visit, which took place two days later, I had grown interested in this girl; it was really a pleasant change to spend an hour in that house and talk to her. On her part, she was delighted to see me, so much was evident even at this early stage. Her mother, noticing how my talk pleased Christine, thanked me as only a sorrowing mother can for what I was doing.

After that, I went more frequently until my visits became of daily occurrence. I had plenty of money, so I spent some of it in buying odd things for Christine; I would take her flowers, books and periodicals, and ornaments for the room, all of which I knew would serve to make her more cheerful and tend to arouse her from the languor into which she was apt to fall during the rest of the day. But I had to proceed with caution in order not to awaken in her mind the suspicion that I was far above her in social standing, for this might have destroyed the illusion which we were trying to create. No doubt she thought I was well-to-do, but not rich.

A month went by, and both Christine and I had learnt to look forward to the daily talk. The girl's face had assumed quite a new expression, a glorified expression; to a superficial observer it might have seemed that she was on the road to recovery, but her mother and I knew that it was not so, and if we had had any doubt on the subject it would have been dispelled by the doctor's verdict. I was acting my part as though the lie were truth; I threw myself thoroughly into it. I grew so interested in this fading flower that my part became unconsciously real to me. It delighted me to see the flush on her cheeks when I entered and when I paid her some little extra attention; I felt that I was doing good both to her and her mother, and I forgot all reserve and plunged headlong into pleasant waters, as it were.

So it happened that, seeing how the cold of approaching winter was sapping her strength and gradually taking her away from us, I redoubled my attentions and ended—as a supreme effort to bring about some good—by asking her to marry me.

Never shall I forget the look in her face, the look of infinite joy, and just as lasting in my memory will be the mother's expression of gratitude when I left the house that night.

Both believed that I was sincere, for I can well understand that the mother would not be able to believe I should go so far beyond the pre-arranged plan.

"And were you sincere?" inquired Archer, interrupting the narrative in order to ask the question which we were all revolving in our minds.

"I have never been able to answer that question satisfactorily," responded Stanton with a shake of his head. "I think not. The circumstances were exceptional, and you must answer the question for yourselves in the light of my opinions and my mode of living. Let me continue!"

From that moment I felt it my duty to do all that I could to save Christine. I had the very best physician in the country and I sent her to the south and installed the two women in a cottage where they could get more sunshine and more comfort. I lavished attention upon her; I spent money right and left in my endeavours to save her. But it was all in vain.

The specialist told me kindly but firmly that there was no hope, that my efforts might result in prolonging her life for a few weeks, but that was all. And even that hope was not realized.

The end came more suddenly than we had expected. Christine awoke to the fact that she was leaving us, and her grief was great—so great that I doubted the wisdom of what I had done during the preceding two months. I asked myself whether it would not have been better not to have interfered, and whether I had not brought upon myself and upon her mother a terrible punishment for our deception.

But after the first anguish, Christine bowed to the inevitable with cheerful resignation; she was happy, so she told me, in the possession of my love; I had made her closing days a delight instead of the misery they had threatened to be, and she was content.

She had a simple funeral and lies in the grave which I purchased in the little cemetery about half-a-mile from the cottage.

I have kept that photo as a souvenir of what I always call a tragic episode; I keep it locked up as a rule, but when I returned to town a fortnight ago I took it out to look at, and by some mischance I must have put it loosely into that album. That's all.

* * * * *

"That reminds me," I said suddenly, as Stanton ceased speaking. "You always go away by yourself for a week in the summer. What about Christine's mother?"

"You connect that week's holiday with her?" asked Stanton with a faint smile. "You are right. She still lives in that cottage, and it appears to me that my part is not yet played to the end, so I spend a whole week with her every year and talk to her about Christine and the days that are passed."

We were none of us inclined for our usual amusements that evening; the story had awakened other thoughts within us; so we soon took leave of our host and made our several ways homeward.

Was Stanton guilty of hypocrisy or was his action the result of excessive, but perverted, goodness of heart?

I have tried to answer that question, and I lean towards the latter explanation.

£10,000 as a Prize

might be offered, and still you wouldn't be more gratified than you will be when you know what the

"G. D."

is.

Don't get impatient, but wait and you will see particulars in next week's

SHORT STORIES.

"In Days of Old When Knights were Bold," the "G. D." was never dreamt of.

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By HEADON HILL.

Author of "The Peril of the Prince," "Seaward for the Foe," "Guilty Gold," etc.

SUMMARY.

THE steamship *Trojan* is homeward bound from the Cape. On board is Michael Standridge, who is returning to England from the Kimberley diamond fields, in possession of the "Kimberley Elephant," the largest diamond found in the colony. On the ship is his half-brother, Simon Hoathley. On the way up the English Channel the latter steals into the miner's cabin with the intention of murdering him and obtaining possession of the diamond. The miner, however, is on the alert, and presents a pistol at the intruder's head.

Michael sells his diamond for £20,000 to Messrs. Strauss and Lightfoot, whose clerk, Swinley Tasker, he discovers in an attempt to rob him of £35. Michael reads Tasker a lecture, kicks him, and departs—having made an enemy of this rascal. Reading is where Michael expects to find news of his daughter, and he purchases Kennett's Cross, a dilapidated farmhouse in the neighbourhood, this house meeting his requirements by being very secluded, and on a clay soil suitable for brickmaking.

He spends his time in making bricks, and as each batch is made he draws out from the bank a thousand pounds in gold, until at length his balance is quite low. One day Michael is thrown out of his pony-trap, and enters a house for assistance. Here he finds Cuthbert Blakesley, the cashier at the bank, and two ladies, and recognises in the younger one, to whom Cuthbert is engaged to be married, a strong resemblance to his wife.

Mrs. Bonfield is able to prove that Marion is Michael's daughter, and he promises to acquaint her shortly with the secret of Kennett's Cross. A few weeks later Marion and Cuthbert are sitting in the garden, waiting for her father, when a constable enters and arrests Cuthbert on the charge of murdering Michael.

At the inquest which follows strong evidence against Cuthbert is given. The latter also makes a statement. The verdict is one of "Wilful murder against Cuthbert Blakesley."

In order to clear his name, Marion lives at Kennett's Cross, and consults Zambra, the famous detective. The latter makes some startling discoveries, and energetically follows up certain clues.

CHAPTER XII.

TAMPONI'S RESTAURANT.

TAMPONI'S Restaurant in the Strand is a rendezvous chiefly patronized by sporting men of a certain class, by fashionable pugilists, by actors who spend most of their time in "resting," and by a contingent of that wideawake division of society which lives no one quite knows how. Tamponi's is neither imposing in its appearance nor extensive in its accommodation, relying rather on the support of regular frequenters than attempting to attract the general public, and retaining this support partly by the excellence of the cooking, and partly by the intimate relations which subsist among the *clientèle*.

It is a very orderly and well-regulated house. Signor Tamponi insists that the doors shall be shut and the gas turned down to the second at closing time. The constable on the beat is never by any chance called upon to quell a disturbance at Tamponi's. Yet there must be reasons why the higher officials of the force—the gentlemen in tweeds and frock coats from Scotland Yard—take such an interest in the place. When one of the latter opens the swing doors just wide enough to cast a comprehensive glance round the little bar and the restaurant beyond, and quietly glides away—at such times and seasons silence generally falls upon the customers for quite an appreciable time.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon, and Carlo, the waiter, was standing in the narrow doorway watching the crowds that jostled along the teeming thoroughfare. This was the slack hour of the day, the lunchers having departed and the diners not having arrived, and as Signor Tamponi himself preferred to minister to the stand-up customers in the bar, Carlo had a little idle time on his hands.

Suddenly there detached himself from the hurrying throng on the pavement an individual whose attire proclaimed him to be of Carlo's own calling. The short, shabby overcoat disclosing the shiny tails of a claw-hammer below, the sombre nether garments, the none-too-clean shirt front topped by a wisp of black necktie, and the thin, down-at-heel shoes that seemed specially built for slipshod locomotion, could have belonged to no one but a waiter. The swarthy features and the greasy black hair further suggested that the newcomer was a compatriot of the worthy Carlo. What more natural, then, that he should stop and enter into a brief but earnest conversation with Signor Tamponi's factotum, and clinch his argument by deftly passing to the latter something that rustled.

Carlo, who had listened first distrustfully, then with eagerness, nodded and retreated into the bar, where his master was chatting with one or two smartly-dressed customers.

Beckoning the signor aside, it appeared the waiter had a boon to crave. A friend of his, one Luigi Carfarelli, had brought the sad news that his—Carlo's—wife was on the point of death. She had been ailing in the morning, but he had not anticipated a dangerous turn. What he wished to propose was that he should go to his home in Soho to watch his dying wife, and that, with the signor's permission, he should himself engage his friend Luigi to take his place for the evening. Luigi was a skilled waiter by profession, and had held important engagements in leading *cafés* both in Paris and London. It was by his misfortune, not by his fault, that he was for a few days out of a situation.

Signor Tamponi was a good-natured man, when his own interests were not threatened, and he at once acceded to his servant's request. The substitute was fetched in and installed in his new duties, while Carlo flitted away sadly, to become absorbed in the ever-flowing stream of the Strand. Presently a party of early diners came in, and passing through, seated themselves in the restaurant

Next week "Short Stories" will tell you all about the "G. D."

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behind. At first the proprietor kept a critical eye on the new hand, but he soon found that affairs in the back room might safely be left to take care of themselves. Luigi Carfarelli waited as to the manner born.

In the course of serving the party the waiter had occasion to go into the front bar to ask the signor for a bottle of wine of a special brand ordered by the diners, and while he was waiting for it an incident happened which tended to show that the menial nature of his employment had not altogether cooled the hot blood of Italy in Luigi's veins. A shoeless, capless urchin pushed open the outer door, and, boldly entering, began to pester the loungers to buy one of the half-dozen boxes of matches which he held in his grime-stained hands. In doing so the lad stumbled up against the waiter, who, with a string of full-flavoured Italian oaths, cuffed and kicked the offender out through the door into the street, not loosing him till he was well outside on the pavement.

The boy gave the waiter as good as he got in the way of choice Billingsgate, and something besides; for, just as Luigi was releasing him with a parting kick, he dropped one of his match boxes and scudded away without stopping to reclaim it. The waiter promptly picked the box up, and after placing it in his pocket returned to his duties, still muttering imprecations at the interruption, to the delight of the loungers in the bar. Perhaps it was the thought of his capture from the enemy that calmed him down, for he evidently set some store by it. Taking advantage of a lull in the requirements of his charges, he retired up the room and examined the matchbox. It contained a pink telegraph form, on which was a message hailing from Wakefield, Yorkshire. Rapidly running his eye over it this is what he read:

"Have been to Morton Delaval. Saw the Rev. Mr. Standridge playing tennis in garden with his children. Tall, fair, good-looking man, quite different from description given by you. Christian name Samuel, not Simon. He and family been here for years, and much respected. From inquiries in village he can be no connection of party you are interested in, who must be a hoax. Returning to-night.—Lewis."

The waiter had barely time to master the contents and crumple the telegram into his pocket, when several customers came trooping into the room in quest of dinner, and the same moment Tamponi's voice was heard calling sharply for him from the bar. Luigi obeyed the summons with alacrity, and found the signor conversing with a young man who was leaning on the counter consuming a sherry and bitters, apparently having just entered. The newcomer seemed to be on terms of considerable familiarity with the proprietor, addressing him as "Tammy," while he in turn was addressed by the signor, in his curious foreign accent, as "Tasker, old fella."

"Here, Luigi," said Tamponi, "you will have to bustle. This gentleman wants dinner for two in the small private room on the first floor. His friend will be here in half-an-hour, so take his order and see the cook has it ready. You will have to be smart to serve the private room and the restaurant as well. Carlo is away," he explained to the customer, "but this chap seems to be up to what-you-call a snuff, and he'll make you comfortable."

Mr. Tasker ran his finger down the menu with which the waiter had presented him, and made a careful selection of what bade fair to be a tolerably lengthy dinner. Luigi took the order with the mixture of deference and approbation which marks the perfect waiter, and slipped away to give the necessary instructions. What with the increasing demands in the public restaurant, and the prospect of a *tête-à-tête* dinner in the room upstairs, his work was all cut out for him; but he contrived to keep abreast of it somehow, flying here and there on the slipshod shoes, and seeming to satisfy everyone at once, till Tamponi began to think seriously that Carlo's retirement had better be made permanent—in favour of Mr. Luigi Carfarelli.

THE COST OF WAR.

From the day when Achilles fasted three days and nights over the body of Patroclus, slain in the ten years' siege before the stout walls of Troy, have we learned of war's sorrows.

The Duke of Wellington wept like a child when he surveyed the bloody, hard-won field of Waterloo. Methuen, it is said, broke down at the ghastly sight of Magersfontein, and returned to his tent that the men might not witness his grief.

"Who dead is must be buried," says Homer, and, we might add, "who ill is must die."

So thought Private John Smith, living now at 19 South Uxbridge Street, Burton-on-Trent. The "Aurania" steamed out to the Cape on December 27th, 1899, with this soldier aboard her (that was before she steamed back with the gallant C.I.V.'s), and in telling me of his trials, on August 29th, 1900, Private Smith says that *that* part of his duty was pleasant enough.

"Shortly after Earl Roberts' famous march into Kronstadt, we were stationed between that town and Jacobsdal to guard the line of communication. Towards the end of April I was laid low with that fell disease enteric fever.

"There were hundreds of men down with it. It has laid low more men than all the shot and shell that was ever fired by Boer Artillery. For several weeks I was in the fever hospital. My stomach was converted into a manufactury of torturing pains, and I grew as weak and helpless as a new-born babe.

"I was for *days unconscious*, but gradually recovered sufficiently to be invalided home."

Yet the suffering of Private Smith was not over.

"I went aboard the Hospital Ship 'Nineveh' in June," he says, "and shortly afterwards sailed for home. During my short stay in South Africa, I lost over 20lbs. in weight. Nothing that I took relieved the constant vomiting, or increased my strength.

"After," he says, "I had been home a few days, my brother, who is an engine driver on the Midland Railway—not of *an armoured train*—advised me to try Mother Seigel's Syrup. I got a bottle. I found it was doing me good. The vomiting *ceased*, and I was able to enjoy all kinds of food. My appetite is now enormous.

"Altogether I have taken four bottles of Mother Seigel's Syrup, and gladly give you permission to use and publish my statement. This syrup is a fine tonic and a great medicine for the stomach. I can especially recommend it *to soldiers returning from South Africa* in feeble health."

Wellington knew the bitter cost of war in 1815.

Methuen in 1899 and 1900.

And the hero of this narrative in 1900, too. His was a personal cost. "Green vomit," Charles Reade writes, "laid her sickly hand on him."

A broken man.—Until the kindly offices of Seigel's Curative Syrup put him on the stepping-stone of "first wealth," which is health.

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The room on the first floor was reached by a narrow flight of dingy stairs, which commenced at the bar end of the restaurant. It was one of two private rooms on the same landing which were used on occasion by parties whose business or pleasure did not demand the too close proximity of other *bons vivcurs*. It was the smaller apartment at the head of the stairs that had been retained by Mr. Tasker for the entertainment of his expected friend. The room was of such limited dimensions that there was not much space for furniture beyond the neatly-draped table in the centre. One side was nearly taken up by the lace-curtained window looking out on the Strand.

On the side near the door was a dinner waggon, and in the right-hand niche by the fireplace a battered piano stood, and that was all, except a few pictures of theatrical celebrities on the walls.

Luigi had managed between whiles to light the gas and arrange the table, and was busy among the downstairs customers again when once more the harsh voice of Tamponi was heard summoning him to the bar. Mr. Tasker was still there, and he was in the act of turning to shake hands with an elderly man who had just arrived—a shambling, yellow-visaged personage, dressed in seedy black, and having an eccentric trick of the eye. At this moment, while the waiter was taking Tamponi's instructions to show the gentlemen upstairs and serve dinner, the swing doors opened, and the same dirty little matchboy glided among the customers, proffering his wares right and left.

The audacity of the intruder produced a wonderful effect on Luigi. Slashing wildly with his doubled napkin, the waiter again cleared the lad out of the bar, and again when he returned breathless and triumphant, he was not without the spoils of victory. This time it was a scrap of paper, which Luigi held crushed in his left hand, while with the other he politely beckoned Mr. Tasker and his guest to the stairs. Standing aside to allow them to pass, the waiter followed them up, furtively examining his latest acquisition as he did so. There was just light enough on the stairs to read the two lines pencilled on the paper:

"Have come back from K. C. I dismantled strong room, pulled down all new brickwork, and took up flooring. Everything was solid. Found no money or anything else concealed. Young lady rather disappointed at failure. Hope you will have better success in other direction.

FERGUSON."

On reaching the private room Luigi's smartness deserted him for the first time during his service at Tamponi's—that is to say, he was about two seconds late in taking the overcoat and umbrella which Tasker handed him. But his wool-gathering was of brief duration, and he made up for it by increased attention to the elder guest, relieving him of his greasy tall hat and black surtout with respectful alacrity. The waiter must not be blamed, because, being new to the place, he was some little time in finding the pegs whereon to hang his customer's outer garments, and consequently heard their opening conversation.

"I ran down by your suburban diggings as arranged, my young friend," said the elder of the two. "Your excellent slavey gave me your message to come on here at last, but I had a good deal of trouble in getting her to do so."

"What could the thick-headed idiot mean?" ejaculated Tasker angrily. "I left word plainly enough that I expected a gentleman to call, and that he was to be sent on to dine with me at Tamponi's."

"Gently, my dear young friend, gently," returned the other; "there was a certain amount of method in the wench's idiocy. In plain words, some person called at your Worcester Park lodgings and inquired for you some three hours before I arrived on the scene. Thinking that he was the intended recipient of your invitation, the maiden gave it to him, and naturally hesitated to give it twice over."

"Who on earth could it have been?" said Tasker, musingly. "It must have been either old Strauss himself or someone sent by him to see if I was really ill. It doesn't matter much if he has spotted me shamming. After to-night, drudgery at the desk ought to be a thing of the past for yours truly. Anyhow whatever it was he hasn't turned up here."

"In the phrase of our noble legislature, the main question had better be laid on the table, had it not, till the honourable member for the kitchen department has retired," said the elder significantly, and at the same moment Luigi having managed to find the hat-rack, disappeared to fetch the soup. When he returned, the conversation had taken a new drift, to be changed, however, rather abruptly on his re-entrance. But the waiter's shuffling shoes made very little noise on the stairs, and he was nearly into the room before his advent was noticed, thus hearing the concluding words of the previous subject. Fragments only reached him at first, growing clearer as he reached the door, in the droning voice of the eccentric-eyed man:

"No difficulty about that—no one within a mile—if necessary, must be silenced for ever—perhaps that would be the best in any case."

To which the younger man replied:

"Well, you are a caution! What, two in ten days? I'd rather make love to her than that, if she's as nice as you say," adding, with a yawn, as Luigi entered, "have you looked up the train?"

"Ten-thirty," said the other; "we have two hours to enjoy these excellent viands and to get to the station."

After handing the soup and uncorking the wine which Tasker had ordered, the waiter still lingered, seeming inclined to establish himself behind the host's chair.

"We don't want this fellow, eh, Hoathley?" said the latter. "We can ring when we want him," and in accordance with the other's gesture of assent the waiter was ordered to withdraw.

Down in the restaurant Luigi was kept busy among the diners, and it was not till he was nearly due to take the *entrées* up to the private room that he was able to obtain a moment's seclusion in the little wash-up pantry behind the stairs.

Going to the gas jet that flared over the sink, he carefully examined the back of his left hand, and proceeded to detach several minute hairs that were adhering to his knuckles. Placing these in a screw of paper, he put them away in his waistcoat pocket, muttering to himself as he did so:

"Cat's fur, no doubt; and now for the name."

Quickly producing from somewhere about his person a printed sheet, he scanned it line by line, till his eyes rested on a name not far from the bottom of the paper. The sheet was a passenger-list of the steamship *Trojan*, more than a year old, and the name on which the waiter fastened with such hawk-like avidity was that of Simon Hoathley.

(To be continued next week)

What are Canapes?

Why, slices of toast cut in fanciful forms and suitably garnished.

There are many other definitions of cookery terms in

Isobel's Home Cookery

For MAY.

- - ONE PENNY. - -

Next week's "Short Stories" will tell you about the "G. D."

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Short Stories That . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, June 3rd. Post-cards only, please. The prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Miss A. Newton, Carshalton House, Johnson Street, Norwich, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

CORONER: "Was the victim conscious when you reached him?" Pat: "Yis, sor; he wor. But, bechune us, I don't belave he knew ut."

TORMENT: "I had a fight yesterday with the boy next door." Father: "Yes; his father called at my office to-day about it." Torment: "I hope you came out as well as I did."

"JANE, did you break the water-bottle?" "Yes, m'm; but, fortunately, I broke it into only three pieces." "Fortunately! How's that fortunate?" "Oh, m'm, when a thing breaks into many pieces, it is hard to pick them all up!"

PATIENT: "As we have known each other so long, doctor, I do not intend to insult you by paying your bill. But I have left you a handsome legacy in my will." Physician: "Very kind of you, I'm sure. Allow me to look at that prescription again. I wish to make a slight alteration in it."

A ST. HELEN'S boy had always declined to eat oatmeal, although his mother had urged it upon him as a strengthening diet. Suddenly he surprised her one morning by eating a liberal plateful and calling for "more." When she asked for an explanation he replied: "I am bound to eat oatmeal till I get strong enough to thrash Georgy Scott."

MRS. BROWN: "Anything for me?" Rural Postmaster: "I don't see nothin'." Mrs. Brown: "I was expectin' a letter or postcard from Aunt Sally Spriggs, tellin' what day she was comin'." Rural Postmaster (calling to his wife): "Did ye see a postcard from Mrs. Brown's Aunt Sally, tellin' what day she was comin'?" His Wife: "Yes, she's comin' Thursday."

* A NORFOLK clergyman tells an amusing anecdote in connection with his first marriage fee. As soon as the ceremony was ended, he stepped forward to imprint the customary salute on the bride's cheek, when the groom intervened. "Noa yeou don't, parson," he said sheepishly. "I kin du thet myself." The parson gracefully yielded the point, and the groom gave the bride a resounding smack on her lips. Then turning to the clergyman he said: "Yeou bean't married, hey? No? Well, if so be as yeou care to du without the fee yeou kin kiss her oncet!" As the parson dare not run the risk of making himself unpopular at the outset he gallantly kissed the lady, whilst the groom complacently pocketed the fee and withdrew with his bride.

IF some men were as big as they feel, they would have to live out of doors.

"Do you enjoy good health?" "Of course. Did you ever know anyone who didn't enjoy good health?" "Yes, the doctors."

TEACHER: "If you are polite and kind to young comrades, what will be the result?" Bully Jones: "They'll know they can lick you."

THE School of Philosophy has not yet determined what a woman should do when her hands are in the dough-pan and an aggressive fly alights on her nose.

SHE: "Oh! Mr. Smith, won't you recite for us this evening?" He: "Really, there will be so many strangers present that—ah——" "Oh! don't mind them; they'll be gone before you're half-finished."

"THAT young Softleigh asked me for your hand to-day?" "And what did you say to him, papa, dear?" "I told him your mother needed both in the washing-tub, but I compromised with him by giving him my foot."

"WHEN I started at your age," said a father to his son, "I arrived in Glasgow with half-a-crown in my pocket. And just to prove to you how determined I was to add to my store I never even changed it." "Perhaps it was a bad one," ventured the young hopeful.

AMATEUR FARMER: "Mr. Green, there seems to be something serious the matter with the horse I bought of you yesterday. He coughs and wheezes distressingly, and I think perhaps he is broken-winded. What would you advise me to do?" Horse Dealer (promptly): "Sell him as quickly as you can; jes' like I did."

"WHEN I was once in danger from a lion," said an old African explorer, "I tried sitting down and staring at him, as I had no weapons." "How did it work?" asked his companion. "Perfectly; the lion didn't even offer to touch me." "Strange! How do you account for it?" "Well, sometimes I've thought it was because I sat down on a branch of a very tall tree."

"THAT was a terrible affair which happened on our railway this morning," began the boy who travels by rail to school. "What was that?" asked several voices. "Why," exclaimed the narrator, "the entire train passed over four men and a young woman!" "They were instantaneously killed, of course?" chorussed the listeners. "No," said the narrator, "miraculous as it may seem, not one was injured. They were under a bridge when the train passed over it!" It was probably a good thing for that youthful storyteller that he cleared out of the playground rapidly.

AN Irishman was working on a new railway a short time since, and one pay day he said to the ganger: "Do you want any more hands, sor, for I've a brother at home that wants a job at wurruk." The ganger asked him what sort of a workman his brother was. "Faith, sor," Pat replied, "he's as good a man as meself." "All right," said the ganger; "tell him to come and start on Monday." "Whoile I'm axing you for my brother, there's me poor old father at home wanting a job at the same time, yor honour." "Well, what sort of a man is your father, Pat?" "Be jabers, sor, he's as good a man as the two of us." "Oh, well," said the ganger, "tell your father to come, and you and your brother can stay away."

Next week "Short Stories" will tell you about the "G. D."

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NOW—OR NOT AT ALL.

Close of the "Daily Express" Special Offer.

The special offer by the *Daily Express* of the Twentieth Century Chambers's Encyclopædia upon reduced terms must now close. The limited number of copies set aside by the publishers for the *Express* distribution in order to introduce the new issue to the public is already practically exhausted, so great has been the public rush to secure this great book bargain.

It is the intention of the publishers immediately to place the work on the market in the ordinary way and at the full rates. Subscribers who miss the *Express* distribution will, therefore, have to pay a high price in one payment for the same work which the *Express* offers at a special reduction and upon easy terms of payment by monthly instalments.

A few sets still remain for distribution—but very few. These will be sent out by the *Daily Express* in the order for which they are applied, no preference of any sort being shown. When the last set is dispatched no further orders whatsoever will be entertained.

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

Dotted about in various parts of this number, you will have perceived, if you are endowed with average powers of vision, certain references to the "G. D." Furthermore, if you be endowed with the average amount of curiosity, you may have wondered what "G. D." stands for.

I am going to enlighten you—later on. Meantime, if you are hard up for something to do, you might very well beguile the time by asking your friends if they know what the "G. D." is. If they don't, you might tell them that they will be able to find out by looking at next week's *Short Stories*.

I may here remark that the "G. D." is not a patent medicine, nor is it a new sort of roller skate or tobacco. The "G. D.," as a matter of fact, is—but thereby hangs a tale.

❦❦❦

And so, "W. W. D." (Swindon), you thought you had caught your worried, overworked editor napping. You thought that in writing "All that *glisters* is not gold," I had misquoted. As a matter of fact, although the word "glitters" is used more frequently in speech, the more accurate editions of Shakespeare contain the word I used. Look at Act II., Scene 7, of *The Merchant of Venice* for yourself and see. Excuse this mild editorial cock-a-doodle-doo, won't you?

❦❦❦

By the way, "W. W. D.," do *you* know what the "G. D." is?

❦❦❦

"Millie" (Crewe).—A queer kind of courtship is observed in certain parts of Burmah. If a man falls in love with a girl he seats himself at a certain distance from her for hours at a time, and steadily glares at her. If the girl feels disposed to encourage his suit, she looks at him occasionally, and if the young fellow perseveres for a day or two, she will finally nod and smile at him, as a sign that he can go to her parents and arrange the marriage settlements.

❦❦❦

"Esther A." sends me the following remarks, prefaced by the query, "Why can't men pack?"

"A woman will take the smallest drawer in the house for her own private use, and will pack away in it bright bits of boxes of all shades and sizes, dainty fragments of ribbon and scraps of lace, foamy ruffles, velvety things for the neck, bundles of old love-letters, pieces of jewellery, handkerchiefs, things that no man knows the name of, all sorts of fresh-looking, bright little traps that you could not catalogue in a column, and any hour of the day or night she can go to that drawer and pick up any article she wants without disturbing anything else; whereas a man, having the biggest, deepest, and widest drawer assigned to him, will throw into it three socks, a collar-box, an old necktie, two handkerchiefs, and a pipe, and to save his life he cannot shut that drawer without leaving more ends of things sticking out than there are things in it."

❦❦❦

Some weeks ago, I commented on the matter of people who are tone deaf. A colonial reader sends me this interesting communication on the same subject:

"Mr. Gladstone had no taste for music whatsoever, cared nothing for it, and knew nothing about it. The writer remembers that upon the occasion of the meeting in St. James' Palace which led to the founding of the Royal College of Music, Mr. Gladstone was one of the speakers, along with the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Edinburgh, the Duke of Albany, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Salisbury, etc. The ex-Premier then confessed his utter inability to appreciate music—his total lack of ear for it. He said that he had tried to cultivate a taste for music, but simply could not, because he was not constituted that way. This is one of the phases of a great man's intellect that is worthy of note."

❦❦❦

There are poets who read *Short Stories*, and satirists at that. Here is a sample of verse sent me:

At Eastbourne Beach.

May Miller on an August day
For a holiday went away.

Her box was full of lingerie,
And evening gowns of *point d'esprit*,

Of high-heeled boots and blucher ties,
And hosiery to dazzle eyes.

To Eastbourne beach she went, and met
Young Mr. Rudge, with eyes of jet.

Gay Mr. Rudge, who wore each hour
A London suit and London flower.

An heiress—Eastbourne called her fair,
And him a multi-millionaire.

They drove together, danced each night,
And Eastbourne watched the handsome sight.

Then suddenly they went away,
He left one night—she left one day.

And Eastbourne gossip said of her
She was a little stenographer.

And he—it really seemed too hard—
Sold damask linens by the yard.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 4,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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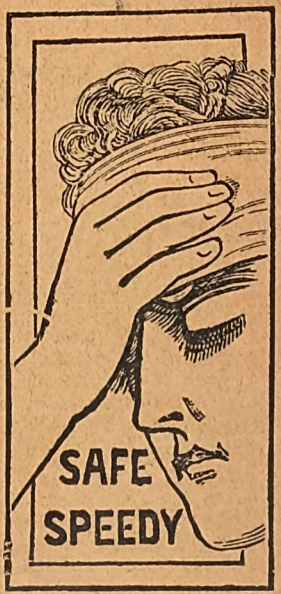

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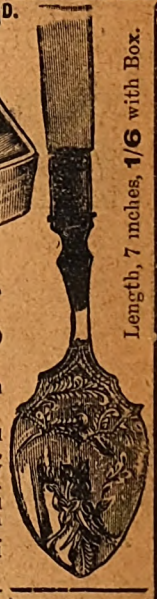

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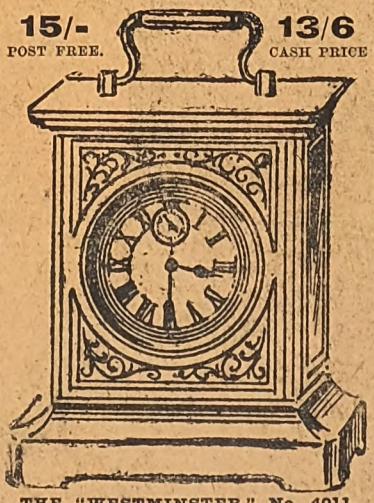

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 649.] For the Week Ending June 8th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

Can Love be Bought

The nurse turned towards him, pistol in hand, and cried in a sad, plaintive voice: "All, all for love of him!" And then, suddenly turning the pistol against herself, she pulled the trigger and fell back, dead.

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CHAPTER I.

GRATITUDE OR LOVE?

"At times I feel that I shall be beaten. The struggle is very hard. When I came to London and entered at the hospital my father was alive; and though he was not rich, yet to all appearances he was in sufficiently easy circumstances to bear without privation the expenses of my professional training. But the preliminary fees had scarcely been paid when he died, and his affairs were in such an unsatisfactory state that my inheritance scarcely came to £50.

"I have tried to spend as little as possible, yet that money has gone to the last penny. I have eked it out as long as I could, and now I don't know which way to turn.

"I feel at times inclined to pick up a broom and sweep a crossing — anything to bring me the absolute necessaries for struggling on. Sometimes as I pass the jewellers' shops, all ablaze with their treasures, I am tempted to steal. It is a blessing there is some difficulty in dishonesty — poverty and want have such a vexatious effect on moral rectitude.

"If I had only the money to complete my training, I feel I have the brains to gain success. I have an allowance of £20 a year; but what is this, though I contrive ever so artfully?"

PLEASE

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The speaker was a young man who was only nineteen, though at times he looked considerably older than his age.

His was a fine face, with strongly marked features and a noble intellectual brow, his dark grey eyes were full of thought, his mouth had power and resolution marked in all its lines, and though its expression was mobile, changing from a sweet smile to firm set look of unshakable determination, there was character marked in everyone of its variations.

It was a warm evening in June, and he was sitting on one of the benches on the Thames Embankment facing the river. The evening was creeping on, and the sun's rays were casting large shadows and the heat of the day was gradually giving way to a softer and enjoyable atmosphere. The young man had removed his hat to partake of the soothing influence of the gentle breeze that played about his head. His words were addressed to a young woman sitting by his side, who by the shape of her bonnet and cloak and white cuffs could easily be distinguished as a professional nurse.

She had large, dark eyes, an irregularly shaped nose, and full lips, and it did not require a very acute observer to detect that she must be some years her companion's senior.

She could not be called handsome, though her eyes, changeful in their expression from the brightest vivacity to keen, almost passionate, sympathy, gave a powerful attractiveness to her face.

Her veil was thrown back and her hands were joined in her lap as she sat listening with a rapt expression of interest on her face to the rather despairing words of her companion.

"Will you listen patiently to me, Duncan," she said. "I met you at the hospital. I saw how hard you worked, I felt you were struggling against adverse circumstances, you had all my sympathy long before we became friends."

"Yes," he answered, "from you alone have I received sympathy. You seem to believe in me, and such a feeling is always flattering. You encourage me in my darkest moments and communicate to me your hopeful spirit. Yes, yes, I can say truly you have been my friend."

"Well," continued the nurse, "I can now speak to you quite openly. I have watched you carefully. I am sure you are one of the few men who are born for success. I am older than you," she blushed as she said this, "and I have thought that as it is my calling to nurse people generally, that it falls within my duty to minister to your mental distress. We have seen a good deal of each other and I have a real sisterly affection and regard for you."

She blushed again more vividly than before, and much more confusedly than a declaration of sisterly regard would seem to demand.

"And now I want to say something, which, after what I have said, will not, I hope, seem to you impertinent. I want to say that I feel so much confidence in you that I wish to lend you the money necessary to complete your studies; I have three hundred pounds, which were left me by my parents. You see, like you, I am an orphan without a single relation in the world. I earn more than enough for all my wants. Do let me help you! After all it will only be an investment, and I know you well enough to be sure it will be a safe one."

The young man, regardless of the publicity of the place, caught hold of both her hands.

"How good and kind you are; how noble!" he exclaimed, "but I cannot, dare not, accept such a sacrifice of friendship and devotion."

The chance meant so much to him that his mind naturally exaggerated the generosity of the offer.

"What have I done to deserve such self-sacrifice? Noble, noble is your offer. I know little of women; study has taken up all my thoughts. I have no leisure for amusement, or to enjoy myself in the society of your sex, yet I am sorely tempted if you can really spare the money, to be mean enough to accept it. Your offer almost appears like a direct interposition of Providence in my affairs, and I shall be proud to look back on your generosity, and owe my success to you."

He stopped for a few moments and earnestly looked at his companion, and then went on:

"You said just now you were older than I, the difference can only be two or three years at the most.

"You said your generous offer was dictated by a sisterly love. I know little what love for one of your sex means—sisterly or otherwise. I know I feel when I am with you a restful repose from present trouble, and a great hope for the future.

"I am sure that must be love. I always am anxious to discuss with you the anxieties of to-day and my plans of to-morrow. I have heard talk which entirely absorbs the mind, distracting it from work, and unfitting it for study. Such a passion could never be mine—yet I feel that I wish that I had someone to associate with my success, so that all my efforts might not be entirely selfish, for to work for oneself alone, even though science be one's mistress, is a form of selfishness, and doubly so, when one uses a profession only as a means to gain a position. I feel I am not expressing myself clearly. I wish to make you understand that for some time I have connected you with all my schemes.

"I am sure you are laughing at me. You shake your head—you are not.

"You offer me now the means of maintaining the fight, and I believe of securing victory. I will take it, but not from a sister, but from someone far dearer, who will share with me later on the fruits of success, a success you have a share in, a success that will be doubly dear to me because it is gained for you.

"Is this a bargain?" he questioned eagerly, "will you when I have won a position, share it with me as my wife?"

His companion's face was lighted up with excessive gladness.

She had been interested in the hard-working student; she had sympathized with him in his struggles, pitied him in his privation.

She had longed to be his friend, and once his friend, she soon discovered that she took a passionate interest in all that concerned him.

Hers was a wild, headstrong nature, partly warped from straightforwardness by a violent temper, an unhappy childhood, and unsympathetic surroundings.

She had struggled with her violent temper, she had tried strong religion, but she was wanting in pious conviction. She had adopted nursing as a sort of self-sacrifice; she was constantly endeavouring to put curbs on herself, and now love, born of pity—a love full of gentleness—had come to this wilful woman, a love for which she was ready to sacrifice herself in anything, and for which even sacrifice became changed into a voluptuous joy. She was five years older than the young

REMEMBER

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student, but chance had rendered her necessary to him, and her heart seemed bursting with the fulness of her happiness.

Her voice was modulated to a tone of exquisite softness, as she answered:

"Duncan, I have loved you for some time. I only know when I first discovered it, it had then become a part, I might almost say the absorbing whole, of my life. I scarcely hoped you cared for me otherwise than as a friend. When I offered to assist you, I never expected to hear that you really cared for me as you say you do; still, I am so pleased—so overjoyed! But listen, dear; we must part for some time. It will be a cruel trial for me, but I want to make sure you really love me. I—I shall never change. But you are young and—a man. Time will soon pass, as we shall both work looking forward to the future. A medical man, even when he has all his degrees, needs capital to start in his profession—we must both bear that in mind. Let us say we will part for six years."

"No, no!" answered the young man. "Why should this be necessary; why should I change. I plight you my word."

"I don't want you to be rash," she rejoined quickly. "I wish you to thoroughly understand what you have proposed in a moment of excitement. I don't want you to sell yourself for three hundred pounds," and seeing a flush rise to his face she slightly changed her rather peremptory tone and said: "Why, in six years you will still be young to marry, and I promise you that if you still wish to, you shall hear from me before the time of probation is past."

"Hear from you," he repeated. "Why, of course, we shall write to each other; it will be such a pleasure for me to let you know all about my progress."

"No, Duncan," she returned, "I wish you to be quite free from my influence. If you really love me as I wish you to, neither absence nor time will alter you. I will not be married out of gratitude."

Her large eyes flashed fiercely.

"You are neither weak nor changeable by nature," she went on, "six years is not such a long time for you to give up wholly to study. You must make a great name. I am very ambitious for you; I wish to have a great pride in you. On my side I shall not be idle. I shall gain money. I am determined that you are to become one of the greatest and most influential doctors in London before you are thirty."

She got up from the seat by the river.

"I must be back at the hospital," she said. "I will post you the money in notes to-night—to-morrow I leave London."

"But you will give me your address," he urged.

"No, for the present I shall be a vanishing lady—remember that mystery adds charm to romance. Though absent I shall hear of you, though you will not know how. In the meanwhile, if I should die, you will, I know, always think of me kindly; if, on the other hand, I live and you remain faithful to me—absolutely faithful, mind—you shall hear from me, and I will give you a chance of fulfilling your engagement. Remember my love is my life, I am too proud to ask you to be true to me. If you were false," and the fire of her glance seemed to burn up the tears that stood in her eyes. "I—I," and then suddenly conquering her emotion she said without finishing her sentence: "Oh, here we are at the hospital. Good-bye——"

She was gone in a minute, leaving the young student astonished and bewildered.

Conflicting emotions struggled within him.

He felt now the future was his—yet this future he owed entirely to the timely interposition of a woman. He tried to persuade himself that as she was now his engaged wife, the assistance she offered he could accept without mental humiliation, but he could not shut his eyes to the fact that this engagement had followed her offer, and probably would never have been entered into had she not made this offer.

He had thought little of love; he could not argue if he was in love or not; he could only compare how feeble was his feeling for her with the unconcealed force of her passion for him.

He was almost alarmed as he reflected on her vehemence. The strangeness of her scheme, the mystery of the six years probation were like incidents in the "Arabian Nights."

That evening he neglected his books as he sat pondering in his garret over the events of his interview with her.

He lay awake long into the night, his brain conjuring up marvellous sequels to the day's adventure.

His dreams were an indistinct repetition of his thoughts.

It was not till dawn was rapidly putting night to flight that he slept soundly, and awoke much later than usual with almost a certainty that the whole affair was a dream.

But on getting up, he found that a letter had been pushed under his door, and on opening the envelope, in addition to a few scribbled words, he found that it contained three Bank of England notes, each of a hundred pounds.

It was a careless, reckless way of sending the money, thoroughly characteristic of the sender.

On the slip of paper which was inclosed, were the following words:

"Farewell, perhaps for six years, perhaps for ever.—Agatha Manton."

CHAPTER II.

A Successful Man.

Over five years have passed since the events recorded in the last chapter took place, and in five years' time brings many changes in the short span which is reckoned as the life of man.

The youth, Duncan Gordon, who was then only one of the numerous students of St. Christopher's Hospital, is now an M.D. of London and an M.R.C.S.

He had highly distinguished himself in his examinations, and had established for himself a reputation as one of the coming men.

Fortune had smiled brightly on him, and fortune has much to do with success in life.

It had happened that, a year before this chapter opens, an operation had to be performed on a statesman, whose life was suddenly menaced by an insidious disease. The celebrated Sir Cuthbert Cutwell was to operate, and he had chosen young Duncan Gordon, who had been his favourite pupil, to assist him.

Already the illustrious patient was under the influence of the anæsthetic administered by a celebrated specialist; already the famed surgeon had the knife in his hand, when his hand was seen to tremble, and at this

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critical moment he was struck down with a slight fit of apoplexy.

Amid the general consternation young Gordon preserved his presence of mind, and rose to the importance of the crisis.

He seized the knife which had fallen from the master's hand, and, with perfect coolness, carried out the difficult and complicated operation, his nerve hard as iron, his hand true as the magnet to the Pole.

This operation had only twice before been performed with success. Thus the young doctor added one more victory to science, and sprang with a bound from obscurity to fame.

The medical papers, the political papers, the world of science, the world of fashion, rang with his name, and the rise from a house surgeon at St. Christopher's to a fashionable doctor, with a house in Cavendish Square, was accomplished in a few months; from a poorly paid drudge to a world-renowned specialist, with a line of private carriages drawn up in front of his residence at the hours when he saw his patients; from attendance on paupers to pocketing large fees from wealthy valetudinarians, and receiving large sums for each operation he performed. All this was a change brought about with a rapidity almost as sudden as the shifting of Aladdin's wonderful palace.

We all of us adapt ourselves quickly to the present; we throw off the past as an adder its skin.

An evil lived through is almost immediately an evil forgotten. Poverty becomes a dream to be moralized over in our sentimental moments, and the past want of comfort is only remembered with a kind of sigh when luxury palls with its excess.

Dr. Duncan Gordon had been so taken up with hard work that he had had little time for sentiment.

Of course, at times his mind reverted to Agatha Manton, but as years went on and no news came from her, the memory of the parting with her took an indistinct form, and when he thought of her she seemed as one long since dead. He almost felt that he had entered into an engagement with a being of another world; yet he held faithfully to his contract.

He never associated with women otherwise than in his professional capacity, and even then his reserve was of an ultra-professional description.

He faithfully recognised that he owed his position and brilliant prospects to that strange woman, who, after administering to him help and encouragement when he was despairing, had faded from his path.

He had given her a pledge which he was ready to keep should she ever appear to remind him of his engagement. Sometimes he fancied to himself that this compact would cease when six years should have passed from the time of their parting; but his stricter honour would hear of no compromise—he was bound to her for life and must keep himself free for her whenever she chose to claim him.

He had long since convinced himself that in his case gratitude had assumed the guise of love; he knew his heart beat with no passion when he thought of her, nor did a particle of romance associate her as being a necessity of his life. He was engaged to the inevitable—to a kind of memory.

Her appearance even was an indistinct image, all but those large, flashing, passionate eyes—those he felt sure he would recognise anywhere.

The day on which we present Dr. Duncan Gordon to our readers, he had finished with his London patients. It was half-past one, and the afternoon he had reserved for a special case he had to see out of town.

He made a hasty lunch for he had no time to waste, as he had promised to be at Sommerleigh at four, which did not allow more than three-quarters of an hour before he must catch a train at Waterloo.

Dr. Duncan Gordon's horses were some of the best in London, but the traffic on Waterloo Bridge was congested, and on arriving at the station he had only just time to get his ticket and take his seat in a first-class carriage, when the engine uttered its shrill shriek and steamed out of the station.

Dr. Gordon gave a sigh of relief; punctuality in keeping appointments was a virtue of the first importance in his mind, and he was pleased to think he should not have to keep the local doctor he had promised to meet in consultation, waiting. At Sommerleigh, a carriage was at the station in readiness for the London doctor, and he was quickly driven to a handsome old country house, standing in extensive and well-wooded grounds. On reaching the house, Dr. Gordon was shown into a comfortable study where the local doctor was waiting for him.

"A very serious case, Dr. Gordon," commenced the local doctor, "the patient has long been ailing, but it is only quite recently I have discovered any alarming symptoms. I own I am rather puzzled, and am pleased we have been able to obtain your advice. We have had a nurse for the patient for over two years; a very clever woman indeed, and I regret she is not here to-day, unfortunately she has been suddenly called to London on some family business. Somehow I fancy, that owing to her absence, my patient has been a little neglected—certain it is I found him much worse—so much worse that I told his daughter I should like a specialist to see him.

"She left the matter in my hands, and I telegraphed immediately to you, and I consider we were very fortunate in being able to secure your presence on such short notice."

The doctor then entered fully into his patient's ailments.

"I had better see the gentleman," answered Dr. Gordon, "from what you say I fear an operation will be necessary."

The local doctor got up and rang the bell, requesting the servant to see if they could go up.

"One of the maids here," he explained to Dr. Gordon "has taken the nurse's place during her absence—unfortunately she does not return till the last train to-night, and, as she has left no address, I have not been able to telegraph to her to hurry her up."

The two medical men then ascended the thickly carpeted stairs and entered the sick room, where their patient, almost in an insensible state, was stretched on the bed.

Apparently he was a man of about sixty; his face was worn with suffering, his skin was of a deadly whiteness, and in general appearance there was little to decide whether the figure on the bed was still really alive.

Dr. Gordon made a rapid examination of the sick man.

He was obliged for information to depend largely on what the doctor and the maid told him, as the patient seemed hardly to understand what was passing around him.

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Once he wearily opened his eyes, but only to immediately close them again.

"A pity the nurse is not here," ejaculated Dr. Gordon in a vexed tone. "However, I have seen enough for the present to form a very decided opinion. If you will come downstairs, doctor, I should like to have a chat over the case with you."

When they were again in the study Dr. Gordon, with a very serious expression on his face, said:

"As you led me to suppose, the case is one in which I fear the worst is to be apprehended. I agree with you entirely on the general diagnosis, but I fancy there is some interior mischief which has escaped your notice. I feel certain that there have been certain symptoms which have not been called to your attention, but which the nurse must have remarked," and the London specialist entered into certain medical details.

The local doctor listened with an air of astonishment, and even with some incredulity.

"She would have been sure to tell me if anything of the kind had occurred," he said. "She is very clever, and remarkably attentive. I have had absolute confidence in her."

Dr. Gordon shook his head distrustfully. "She must have noticed the symptoms I refer to," he said positively; "they must have attracted her attention if she has the most elementary knowledge of nursing."

"Yes, yes," answered the local man, "if they occurred."

"There is no doubt in my mind they have," said Dr. Gordon authoritatively, "and for some time past you would have recognised, if you had known of them, that an operation was necessary."

"Of course, of course," assented the doctor.

"Now the patient is so weak," continued the young specialist, "that this operation will be a most critical affair. However, if it is not performed the patient cannot live a week; he may die at any moment, even before the operation can be executed, but I think that we may delay till to-morrow, so as to get a first-class man down from London to give the anæsthetic, for this will be a delicate business."

"Yes, **certainly**," agreed his *confrère*.

"I will, therefore, if this course be decided on," went on Dr. Gordon, "telegraph immediately to Dr. Eather, and will at the same time make arrangements with a friend of mine to see my patients **to-morrow** morning, as I shall stay here over the operation. Dr. Eather will be here to-morrow by ten, or will send someone we can rely on. I had better likewise wire to St. Christopher's for another nurse."

"Yes," replied the other doctor, "but our nurse will be back to-night, and our patient, Mr. Warwick, when she is here, will have nobody else to do anything for him. She has a wonderful influence over him."

"As you like," answered Dr. Gordon, "but a man in Mr. Warwick's state ought to have two nurses."

"There can be no harm in getting another nurse down," said the local doctor doubtfully. "I will ring the bell and tell the servant to ask Miss Warwick to come in, so she may hear what you advise."

Dr. Gordon nodded and sat down to the table to write out the necessary telegrams, while the other doctor gave the servant the message for his mistress.

The London doctor was still engaged with his telegrams when the door of the room opened and, looking up from his work, he saw a girl enter.

At first his was a vacant stare, such as a man engaged in any occupation gives when he is disturbed, but the look of preoccupation soon gave way to one of sympathetic interest as he examined the girl.

She came into the room rather nervously and seemed relieved when she had reached the side of Dr. Raynham the local practitioner. Her face wore a questioning expression—a sort of look of dependence and trust that sought advice.

She was about seventeen, developing rapidly into the grace of early womanhood, shyly conscious of the fact and girlishly ashamed of her own responsibility.

She knew that she was lovely; if her looking-glass had not told her so, the expression of every man she met must have let her into the secret, but she had not yet

"You—you!" he exclaimed, "and is it thus we meet again?" He had recognised . . . Agatha Manton.

GOLDEN

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gained the assurance which allows a woman to undergo admiration with composure.

Her soft brown hair glinted in the rays of the afternoon sun that stole in with rich light through the painted glass of the study windows. Her large blue eyes were wide open in their inquiring glance, and were full of that sympathy which softens a woman's look almost to angelic tenderness.

Her lips were slightly parted, disclosing her small, regular, pearly teeth. There was a slight blush on her cheeks which contrasted with the soft, delicate whiteness of her skin.

She wore a loose, flowing house-gown, which had evidently been made for some time, as it was now too short for her, and disclosed not only a delicate high-instepped foot in a pretty slipper, but a neat ankle also, and even the outward curving of the black hose over the instep.

All this Dr. Gordon noticed in a much shorter time than it has taken to write or even to read, and he rose stiffly from his seat as Dr. Raynham, taking the girl's hand in the manner of an old friend, who had known her before young-ladydom days, and who still, after the fashion of old people, looked on her as a child, as she was when he first knew her, led her towards his London colleague. The state of the case was briefly described to the girl, both doctors insisting on the urgent necessity of the operation.

Miss Warwick seemed reluctant to arrive at a decision.

"Had we not better wait and hear what the nurse says when she returns?" she questioned.

"My dear young lady," returned Dr. Raynham, "Dr. Gordon's time is precious. There must be no hesitation, if your father's life is to be saved."

"Will you let me leave everything in your hands, Dr. Raynham?" said Violet Warwick.

"Certainly," he returned, "and I put my authority into execution by deciding that the operation must be performed."

"I suppose there is some sort of inn in the village where I can get a bed?" asked Dr. Gordon.

"Unfortunately the nearest hotel is at some distance," said Raynham.

"Of course, you will stay here, Dr. Gordon," Violet suggested timidly. "I am sure my father would wish it, though I am afraid you will find it lamentably dull. Dinner will be ready at half-past six; we keep early hours down here. I hope, Dr. Raynham, you will be able to stay and keep Dr. Gordon company."

"I regret that it is impossible," answered the country practitioner. "I have several pressing cases I must see; I shall not finish my professional work till late. Should you want me in the night for any unexpected complication, don't hesitate to send for me, Dr. Gordon. You may depend on my being round early to-morrow morning. I will take your telegrams if you like; I shall have to pass the office. Good afternoon. I know I could not leave you in better hands," and Dr. Raynham climbed into his gig, which was waiting for him, and rattled off.

A servant showed Dr. Gordon into a comfortable bedroom, and when the maid had left him he threw himself into an easy chair and carefully thought over the case he had been called to see, and the result of his reflections was far from complimentary to the professional skill of Dr. Raynham.

It was a nuisance he could not get back to London, but he was interested in this case and not quite satisfied that there was not something in the back-ground which he was determined to ferret out.

He was still in his chair when he heard a knock at the door, and the servant obeying his "come in" informed him that dinner was served and that Miss Warwick was waiting for him.

"What! Half-past six already!" ejaculated the doctor, and hastily washing his hands, he descended to the dining-room.

Violet Warwick was the only occupant of the dining-room, except a staid old man-servant, who stood behind her chair. With a short apology the doctor took the seat which was prepared for him.

"If you are late it is my fault," Violet replied. "Since father has been ill we do not sound the gong; I ought to have sent up to you before."

The table was richly laid with old-fashioned silver plate and delicate cut glass, and from a conservatory which opened into the dining-room, the soft green of palms and ferns, and the perfumes of sweet-scented flowers gladdened both the senses of sight and smell.

Violet was dressed in a white *mousseline de laine*, and her delicate loveliness was set off to perfection by the soft, clinging folds of her simple drapery.

"I am very anxious about my father, Dr. Gordon," she said. "Dr. Raynham says you are almost a magician in your science. If you can only restore him to health, what an unpayable debt I shall owe you."

"The case is very serious," answered the doctor, "but by no means hopeless; I do not somehow fancy he has been properly nursed, and yet Dr. Raynham seems to have confidence in the attendant you have for him."

"Oh, yes, yes!" said the girl, looking about her as if she feared someone might be listening. "They all think nurse is deserving of every trust. She has full power here. I never interfere with her, she has full authority. My father trusts her implicitly."

The girl spoke hurriedly, and as if in terror of something, more as if she were uttering a lesson she had learnt than the expression of her own feelings.

The doctor noticed this, and still intent on his purpose, stuck to the point.

"Will you be quite frank with me, Miss Warwick. I almost fancy you are not quite so satisfied as the others with this nurse."

"Oh, don't say so," she returned quickly; "and who am I that I should give an opinion?"

The doctor did not press the matter further, but the girl had said enough to strengthen his unfavourable opinion of the nurse.

He was convinced there was something wrong.

He was becoming interested in the case and was very anxious to see this nurse, whose authority over the sick man, the doctor, and the whole household seemed all powerful.

"I shall have a good talk to her," he resolved. "I will let her know at once that it is no good trying to deceive me," and then turning to Violet, he said:

"Do you know, Miss Warwick, where this nurse received her professional training, and may I ask what her name is?"

"I think," the girl answered, "she was for some time at St. Christopher's Hospital, and her name is Miss Duncan."

"A strange coincidence!" ejaculated Dr. Gordon. "I was a student at St. Christopher's, and my Christian name is Duncan."

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CHAPTER III.

The Green-Eyed Monster.

The evening passed quickly for both Dr. Gordon and Violet Warwick. She had a pleasing, trustful manner, and the young people were soon on good terms, the doctor's reserve melting before her child-like simplicity. She showed him some of her drawings and spoke with enthusiasm of her favourite poets and authors.

There is a halo of glory and idealism round a lovely and pure woman. A girl, in her innocence, scatters the coarse vapours of materialism as a bright sun the mists of the morning; she idealizes love, and is thereby herself idealized.

Dr. Gordon felt the subtle intoxication of admiration stealing to his brain. He fancied he detected the stirring motion of her breath as she leant across the table; the perfume of her hair stole over to him, making the blood throb in his pulses.

A man unaccustomed to woman's society is the more readily influenced when exposed to its alluring charms.

His eyes expressed his feeling. As Violet perceived his heightened colour and noticed his look of admiration, her eyes fell before his, and her face was suffused with blushes.

She could not explain what she experienced, it was all so new to her; she could not say if she was pleased or angry. She shrank back in her chair, almost frightened.

Poor child! She had never before had this unrestrained intercourse with any man except her father and old Dr. Raynham, and she had already admitted to herself that she thought Dr. Gordon to be good-looking, and she knew him to be clever.

They were both children in matters of the heart; he, with all his learning and professional skill, as much as she.

It was late, the hands of the clock had moved almost unnoticed; they had no idea that time had slipped by so quickly.

But as each of them realized the emotion which had arisen in them, an uneasy silence suddenly interrupted their conversation, and neither had the necessary self-command to clear the awkwardness of the situation by some trivial remark.

At this moment the silence, which was oppressing each of them, was interrupted by a knock at the hall door.

"It must be the nurse," said Violet, hastily rising.

The doctor noticed that Miss Warwick resumed, as it were instinctively, her former nervous manner, and the troubled look returned to her eyes.

The nurse, even while outside the door, appeared to assert her supreme influence.

All this struck Dr. Gordon, and he felt eagerly impatient for his interview with this important personage.

He began already to fancy she might resent his presence as an intrusion, since he had been called in without her consent being obtained.

She returned as mistress of the house, claiming admittance at the front door, not entering modestly by the servants' entrance, as he had expected, and her voice was soon heard, imperiously giving orders in the passage.

"The master's much worse, miss," said an obsequious servant's voice. "He was so bad that Dr. Raynham and Miss Violet telegraphed early this morning for a doctor from London."

"Indeed!" responded a hard, firm voice, "And all this without waiting for me!"

"Yes, miss, and the London doctor's come."

"Yes," returned the voice of the nurse. "And I hear, miss, an operation is to be performed to-morrow morning on the master. The London doctor is in there with Miss Violet."

Again a sharp "indeed" was ejaculated. There was a momentary silence, and then the nurse added in a lower tone of voice:

"I will see your master, and then I will have a talk with the doctor."

Violet looked up uneasily at Dr. Gordon; the expression on her face showed fear which was struggling with an evident desire of asserting her own authority. She seemed anxious that he should encourage her.

The door of the room was slightly ajar, and every word had been heard by them both distinctly.

"So that is the nurse," said Dr. Gordon, "she says she will talk to me; I likewise wish to have some very serious conversation with her."

"I acted for the best," said Violet, appealingly, the tears rising to her eyes. "I really thought another opinion was necessary. Directly she was gone, I urged Dr. Raynham to take decisive steps."

"You did quite right," said the doctor; "it was an imperative duty you fulfilled; if you had not done so your father could not have lived; this ought to have been done before, the nurse must have had warning of the nature of the case. She seems to have an almost unlimited influence both with your father and Dr. Raynham."

"Yes," answered Violet, looking down. "Father trusts her implicitly. I rarely see him now, she says I agitate him, and that he is always worse when I have been with him."

"There is something I do not quite understand," replied Gordon; "it is evident she has neglected her patient. I almost fancy——"

But before the doctor could explain himself further the old butler came into the room to inform Violet that Miss Duncan wished to see her.

The interview took place in the next room.

Only scattered fragments of the conversation reached Dr. Gordon, but it was impossible not to hear that the nurse was much put out, and after some moments he could not avoid hearing the nurse say: "I have just seen your father. He says, since an operation must be performed he wishes it delayed, as he has important business he wishes settled first. I have his authority to pay this London doctor his fee and dispatch him about his business. I thought Dr. Raynham had more judgment than to act so foolishly in my absence."

Then he heard that Violet was in great distress. He caught the words, "His life depends on it; he will die if there is any delay."

"Pooh, pooh!" returned the nurse scornfully, "doctors will say anything to pocket the fee for an operation. I am acting by your father's direct

GREAT SERIAL STORY
The Golden Dwarf,
BEGINS JUNE 25TH.

BEGINS

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instructions, and, you may be sure, in his interest. Go to bed miss. I will see this doctor; he will not attempt to humbug me."

Dr. Gordon heard the outer door shut, and braced himself up for his interview.

He now felt certain that the nurse had some sinister motive for delaying the operation, the immediate performance of which was the only hope for prolonging Mr. Warwick's life.

He was determined to baulk her. He was a man of dogged resolution. He felt resolved to fight in Violet's interest; he had become enthusiastic in her behalf; it was a pleasure to be able to serve her.

He had made up his mind not to be daunted by the virago; he would, if necessary, apply to a magistrate, and expose her.

He had not much confidence in Dr. Raynham; he had read in a few minutes the man's weak character, and had discovered that he stood in awe of the nurse. But he reflected with some satisfaction that Dr. Raynham and Dr. Duncan Gordon were two very different persons.

He had a mind to commence the battle—to touch the electric bell and tell the servant he wished to see the nurse.

"Yes, that will be best," he reflected, and he carried out his intention.

The servant looked startled at the message, but did not offer any remark.

"I ought to have mentioned my name," thought Dr. Gordon. "Never mind, here she comes."

The door was opened; a shadow fell on the carpet.

"Strange," he thought, "she seemed to have character and determination enough. Why does she hesitate in the doorway?"

The visitation was only momentary, and was made up for by the quickness of her subsequent advance. Suddenly she stopped, exclaiming:

"You! Yes, I knew it was you from the first glance—altered, yes altered; but much as I figured you would be. Do you not know me?"

The doctor looked up like one in a dream. There was almost an expression of fear on his face as he returned the glance, and felt those dark eyes eating into his inmost thoughts and reading every impression in his mind.

"You—you," he exclaimed, "and is it thus we meet again?"

He had recognised that this nurse, against whom his thoughts were so strongly prejudiced, was no other than Agatha Manton.

CHAPTER IV.

A New Compact.

There was a short silence.

Miss Manton had seated herself on a low chair, her elbows on her knees, and her cheeks resting on her clenched fists.

After the silence had lasted for some minutes, she rose, and approaching him, said:

"I did not intend that we should meet, yet, but circumstances have been stronger than my will. I have heard of your success with pleasure; I was always sure of it."

He felt that her restless eyes were wandering over his face trying to read his thoughts. He answered:

"Yes, I have been successful, but I have not forgotten that I owe all to you."

"Sit down," she said, drawing her low chair close to him "tell me that you are pleased to see me. My only pleasure since we parted has been looking forward to the time when we should meet again."

She caught hold of his hand almost as if it were a child's and held it tightly clasped in hers, as if asserting her right to its possession.

He noticed that the outlines of her face had hardened and her eyes seemed to have acquired a harsh expression of resolution.

"I have remained faithful to you and my promise," he said. "I am, of course, ready to redeem my pledge when you wish."

"Not yet," she replied. "I shall not call on you for the fulfilment of your promise for some time yet, and I shall not come to you as a portionless bride."

The cruel suspicions the doctor had entertained before he had discovered the identity of the nurse, rushed back to his mind and took fresh force as he recalled her reticence and her suggestion of money she would have. It was impossible that she, one of the most skilful nurses of St. Christopher's, should not have noticed the symptoms which had never been communicated to Dr. Raynham.

He felt his face was betraying his thoughts, and he was conscious that her large dark eyes were fixed intently scrutinising him.

"Well?" she ejaculated, sharply and interrogatively.

"I was thinking of the sick man upstairs," he returned, almost in a tone of apology.

"Oh, yes," she answered quickly. "You have formed an exaggerated opinion of the gravity of his present state."

"That is impossible," returned the doctor.

She looked at him anxiously.

"Well, perhaps you are right," she said, "but the operation cannot take place to-morrow, as you have arranged."

"Time is precious," said the doctor. "I should not be doing my duty if I did not tell you very plainly that an immediate operation is the only chance of saving his life. Why should there be any delay?"

"Because he has decided that he will not have the operation take place to-morrow. I am directed to pay you your fee. You were sent for without his consent, and he wishes Dr. Lancet to operate. If there is really a necessity for such extreme measures, I am to send for him to-morrow."

"The patient upstairs must have improved wonderfully since I saw him to have been able to communicate so fully with you," he said. "Are you sure you clearly understood him? When I was with him he was unable to speak, and appeared almost wholly unconscious."

"He has great confidence in me, and I understand him," she answered.

"I must speak very seriously," said Dr. Gordon; "your local doctor, Dr. Raynham, and I went thoroughly into the case. We are of the same opinion as to the action to be taken. If you oppose us, are you aware that you are undertaking a very great responsibility?—that, in the case of the patient's death, Miss Warwick could, if she chooses, prefer a very serious charge against you, and this would be readily enough believed if it were proved that the operation were delayed for any private interest of your own."

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"And you dare to speak to me like this," she ejaculated.

"It is my duty," he replied firmly.

"Let Mr. Warwick explain before me and Dr. Raynham the purport of the message you gave me, and then no responsibility will rest with you."

"I can satisfy Dr. Raynham," she retorted.

"But I must be satisfied," he rejoined, "for your sake as well as for my own."

Perhaps for the first time in her life Miss Manton was baffled, and as she looked at the man before her, she, womanlike, admired him for his superiority over her.

"As you will," she answered submissively. "Mr. Warwick has over and over again expressed to me his desire that if an operation should be necessary it should be performed by Dr. Lancet, but since you have been sent for, and you think there is no time to be lost I will persuade him that he cannot have a more skilled operator than you. But you must put off the hour from ten till twelve. Mr. Warwick sent me on the journey from which I have just returned to ask his lawyer to come to him in respect to his will."

Dr. Gordon looked at her very searchingly.

She sat with her eyes cast down on the floor, as if not caring to meet his glance.

The tables were turned; it was no longer she who was trying to read his thoughts, but he who was attempting to penetrate into her hidden purposes.

CHAPTER V.

The Doctor's Visitor.

Dr. Gethu and the nurse from St. Christopher's arrived shortly after ten the next morning, and Dr. Raynham drove up in his gig about the same time.

Some slight refreshment was provided for the medical men, and Dr. Gordon announced to them that the operation had to be delayed for an hour or so, as Mr. Warwick had some business which he wished to transact first.

The lawyer and his clerk had arrived by the same train which brought the doctor from London, though they had only joined it at Marshborough', the county town, some twenty miles distant from Sommerleigh, which was the nearest station to Mr. Warwick's house.

The nurse, Miss Manton—Miss Duncan as she was known at Mr. Warwick's—had met the lawyer on his arrival, and had immediately conducted him to the sick man's room.

The business did not take very long, and was concluded by eleven, shortly after which hour, the nurse came down and said that she was now ready for the doctors.

Dr. Gordon had prescribed for Mr. Warwick the previous evening, and the medicine appeared to have had a truly marvellous effect.

He was perfectly conscious, and though his cheeks were flushed, apparently with fever, the nurse called the doctor's attention to the fact that Mr. Warwick was perfectly reasonable, and quite fit to make his testamentary depositions.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Warwick testily, though very feebly, but distinctly. "No one will ever dare to deny that I perfectly well know what I am about. In rewarding your services I have only done what is right. It is not a bit too much, only——"

"Do not disturb yourself," said the nurse, hurriedly interrupting him, "you must be calm, you are really injuring yourself."

Dr. Gordon bent over the patient and said kindly and reassuringly:

"We hope there are many years of life before you yet."

Dr. Gethu approached with his facebag of gas, and soon Mr. Warwick was insensible.

But a momentary glance had first passed between Dr. Gordon and the nurse. The doctor's look was stern, and hers, seeming to comprehend, it was conscience-stricken and subdued.

The operation was wonderfully performed; Dr. Gordon's skill was unerring, and the patient, though utterly exhausted, was restored to consciousness.

"I fear," said Dr. Gordon to Dr. Raynham, "we are too late. This ought to have been done weeks ago. I can scarcely hope Mr. Warwick will have the strength to rally. I must return to town with Dr. Gethu. If you should think my presence again desirable, telegraph and I will come immediately."

The doctors had a short chat in the study till the brougham was ready which was to take the two London men to the station.

Miss Manton did not attempt to see Dr. Gordon alone; on the contrary, she did not leave the sick man's room till the doctors had quitted the house, but as Dr. Gordon was descending the steps to the brougham which was outside, Miss Warwick rushed out to him.

"Have you saved my father?"

"I fear not," he answered, "but I have done my best."

She burst into tears, and he, turning back, approached her and took her hand.

"Let me hear from you," he said deliberately. "I fear there is some dreadful plot against you, which I can and will frustrate."

* * * * *

Dr. Gordon had been back at his duties in London for more than a fortnight, but had received no communication concerning Mr. Warwick, nor had he heard from Miss Manton. He was concluding almost against his own judgment that the operation had been successful, and that the patient's life had been spared.

He was going through his customary morning routine of seeing his patients and prescribing for them, when, in examining the book in which the names of the patients were inscribed before they were shown into the waiting-room, he was startled by seeing that the name of the latest arrival was a Miss Violet Warwick.

She was ushered into the consulting-room at once.

She was attired in deep mourning, and her face, pale and drawn, showed that she had suffered much.

She took the chair he offered her, and, sinking into it, burst into tears.

Dr. Gordon, standing by her side, thought it best that she should give full vent to her emotion, and waited patiently till she should be more composed.

After a few minutes, with tears still in her eyes, she looked up at him with the trustful, earnest expression he remembered so well, and said:

"I remembered your promise, you see, and have come."

"I feared the worst," he answered sadly. "I cannot tell you how truly and how deeply I sympathise with you."

The expression on his face fully bore out his words.

To thank him seemed too commonplace to her; there is a confidence which despises set forms. Her face expressed, however, her gratitude, and she went on:

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"My poor father died a week after the operation. She would not let Dr. Raynham send again for you. She persuaded him that it was not necessary. She thought it better he should not even write to you, and she managed to convince him that my father was getting better; at least, he told me so."

She stopped for a few seconds; but finding Dr. Gordon made no remark, she went on:

"The funeral took place yesterday"—here fresh tears for a minute stopped her utterance—"and afterwards the will was read. Firstly, my father's original will, which left me everything, and which was in the charge of a London solicitor; then a later document drawn up by a lawyer at Marshborough, which bequeaths to me the sum of £1,000 when I reach the age of twenty-one, and the remainder of the estate to the nurse, whose name figures in it as Agatha Manton, not Duncan, as we know her, in consideration, says the will, of her devoted care of my father, and because she was his affianced wife. Moreover, he leaves me to her care, and stipulates that if I marry"—here the girl flushed—"without her consent the money left to me goes to her with the rest of the estate, which is valued at thirty thousand pounds."

The doctor's face wore a severe expression, yet in his eyes there was a strange light, that seemed to mask relief from a heavy burden.

"This will must be disputed," said the doctor resolutely.

"So the London solicitor said at first," the girl answered. "But the nurse was prepared for this objection, and appealed to Dr. Raynham to say whether my father had not clearly expressed his intention before the operation, and asked him if his patient had not then a clear perception of what he was doing. The Marshborough lawyer said he had seen my father a month previously, and he had then been instructed concerning the will. It is true that at that date my father, requiring a solicitor in a hurry in reference to the purchase of a small estate, did send for this man."

"All this is plausible," Dr. Gordon answered, "but for all that the will must be disputed.

"Meantime, you had better stay in London for a few days."

The doctor, without giving a thought to his patients who were waiting for him, touched the bell and gave instructions to the man who answered it, to send his housekeeper to him.

"Now, Mrs. Baxter," he began, when this important personage appeared, "here is a young lady who has come to London under very sad circumstances. She is obliged to stay in town for a few days. What can you suggest as to where she should stop?"

"The blue bedroom is all ready," returned the oracle, "the young lady will find the room very comfortable."

Both the doctor and Violet blushed.

"You see, Mrs. Baxter," explained the doctor, "the young lady is not a relation, and——"

"Hum," ejaculated Mrs. Baxter, whose sympathy had been awakened by Violet's pretty face and deep mourning, but who now, noticing the blushing cheeks of the pair shrewdly, concluded that perhaps she was soon to have a mistress, a thought never overpleasing to a bachelor's housekeeper.

Her significant look troubled both the doctor and Violet, the former almost regretting that he had mixed his housekeeper up in the matter at all.

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"Hum!" she repeated, "my daughter, you know, is married to a baker, the young lady might not object to stay there for a short time. They will do all they can for her, I can answer for that."

Dr. Gordon looked at Violet, who nodded consent.

"Capital, Mrs. Baxter," he said. "Will you take the young lady, Miss Warwick, the daughter of a late patient of mine, round to your daughter's this afternoon; and will you look after her for the present? I want to have a chat with you, Miss Warwick, before you go. Will you do me the pleasure of taking lunch with me, and then we can talk matters over?"

"I am not hungry," Violet answered. "Perhaps—I don't think I will stay. Your time is valuable."

"Oh, you will be hungry at lunch-time," put in Mrs. Baxter. "Of course you will stay and take something. If you will come with me now I will take you up to the drawing-room, where you can look at the illustrated papers till the doctor has finished seeing his patients," and, settling the matter thus, she escorted the girl out of the room.

At lunch both the doctor and Violet were very reserved at first.

Each had, in some degree, realized the actual position, at least as each of them viewed it.

Violet, when the doctor opposed her staying at his house, with a sudden rush of knowledge, felt how true his objection had been. Not till then did she realize how eagerly she had availed herself of his invitation, how pleased she had been that circumstances had happened in such a way that she could appeal to him for protection.

The doctor was delighted with the solution of the difficulty which thus presented itself. Every circumstance favoured him; even Agatha Manton had played into his hand.

She had shown herself as the breaker of the original engagement, and she allowed him to propose to Violet without appearing as a fortune hunter, since she had obtained the girl's rightful inheritance.

"I shall never be able to thank you enough for your confidence in me," he said to Violet. "I feel it is not only a privilege, but a delight to advise you."

Her eyes were cast on the ground, as she replied:

"I should do whatever you say without hesitation."

"Would you?" he explained earnestly, "would you relinquish this inheritance if I thought it was best?"

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"Certainly, if you think I ought to."

"Suppose," he went on, "my counsel were based on sentimental grounds. Suppose I said give it up, because I feared that later on the money might draw to you selfish admirers. Suppose I were to say that, if you had wealth, one who loves you with his whole soul would not dare to tell you of his love, much as he longs to make you his wife, lest his motives might seem selfish, if he could not prove that he loved you for yourself alone. Pray do not think I am abusing hospitality, nor the trust you have in me. Forgive me, if I am inopportune in my declaration in your time of trouble and sorrow, for I must tell you that I love you. I loved you when I first saw you, but then I was bound by a tie—a tie of gratitude to another woman. I can say with truth that I never loved till I saw you. You came to me as a revelation of what true gentle womanhood is. At first I worshipped at your shrine, as some earnest enthusiast might before the image of some holy saint. But now I long to have the right to protect and watch over your life. I long for the right of preserving you from the polluting and cruel influences of the world!"

"What—what?" she answered, "you really love me, you ask me to be your wife? Must I confess that I have just found out I love you, and I feared that my discovery meant unhappiness, for I never thought a man like you would care for me. Now I seem so happy that I fear I am wicked to be able to entertain so much joy when my poor father has only just been buried. Joy should not be possible directly after such sorrow, but my wretchedness seems even to make my possible happiness greater still. I could not think that you—you," and with what pride and admiration she looked at him, "could ever love me."

She was now ashamed of herself, and hid her face in her hands.

He approached her and, bending down, imprinted a kiss on her forehead.

She sprang up.

"You told me," she exclaimed quickly, suddenly recalling what he had said, "that you were engaged! How have you broken it off? What was her name?"

"She broke it off," he returned, "by consenting to marry your father! Her name is Agatha Manton."

Here they were both startled by a violent knocking at the street door.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LOVE THAT KILLS.

THE servant who answered the knock at the street door had orders never to admit anyone while his master was at lunch.

Dr. Gordon was therefore astonished to overhear that a lengthened parleying was going on in the hall.

He concluded, therefore, that the visitor came on a matter of pressing importance, when before he heard the street door close on the caller's departure a knock came at the dining-room door.

The servant entered, and was about to give some message, when he was pushed forcibly on one side, and Miss Manton stood confronting the doctor and Violet.

Dr. Gordon dismissed the servant with a gesture, and advancing hastily, exclaimed:

"This is an unpardonable intrusion—"

"Stay!" interrupted the nurse. "Are you aware that Miss Warwick is my ward, and in following her here, and endeavouring to prevent her from compromising herself, I am only doing my duty."

"Since we are to come to full explanations," he returned sternly, "perhaps I may relieve your anxiety by informing you that Miss Warwick has consented to become my wife, and that on my advice she refuses to recognise that you have any right to control her conduct."

There was a look of desperate hatred in the nurse's face, but Violet met it without flinching, and coming to Dr. Gordon's side, put her hand on his arm. She had feared and dreaded this woman long enough; she felt now, secure in his love, she could defy her.

"Violet," said the doctor, "I want to have a few words in private with Miss Manton—will you go upstairs to the drawing-room, and wait for me there?"

A moment later and the doctor and Miss Manton stood facing each other.

They knew that the interview before them would tax the resources and energy of each; the buttons were off the foils, it was a duel to death.

"So that chit has come between us," commenced the nurse, "and for her doll face you are ready to forget the past and cast aside my love. You will never know how I have loved you, and how I have cherished this, the one weakness of my character. I should have been your slave, I was willing to sell my body and soul for your advancement, and this is my reward."

"Let us discuss the question dispassionately," returned Dr. Gordon. "I should never have failed in my engagement to you, however distasteful this engagement might have become to me, had not circumstances of your own framing made our union impossible. Do you understand me?" with a sneer.

"No," she answered. "I am not good at guessing riddles."

"Firstly, then," rejoined Duncan Gordon, "I discovered that by concealing symptoms of Mr. Warwick's disease you had deceived Dr. Raynham as to the gravity of his patient's illness. This was not by inadvertence, I knew you had some interested motive; it is useless now to deny it. Before I knew who the nurse was, I was convinced of this, and I was determined to expose her. You will never know how my heart was wrung when I found out that you were the nurse and that you wished me gone, because you feared I might save the sick man's life. Surely this was enough to sever the bonds which had drawn us together. I could not shut my eyes to your intentions, and I determined to do my best to save you, in spite of yourself, and I trusted I had done so when you consented to my staying. I owed you everything. I could not guess what temptation had come across your path—we are all weak at times. I rejoiced at the thought that I might have helped you to conquer an evil instinct. I had arrived in time to save you from an actual crime, and my gratitude was so great that I determined not to let the certainty I had acquired, dreadful as it was, separate us."

He paused for a few seconds; her eyes were fixed on him; she tried to still her breathing so that each of his words might be more distinct.

"Go on," was her only uttered comment. He continued:

"The next morning I was sure the solicitor's visit was only another move in your scheme. When I bent over the sick man, do you know what I discovered?"

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He paused; but she did not answer, and her large dark eyes wandered restlessly, as if trying to avoid his glance.

"I found," he went on, his words articulated with forced distinctiveness, "that the patient had been drugged with some powerful stimulant so as to deceive those who might see him as to his true condition. I concealed even this out of gratitude for the past."

"Gratitude, always gratitude," she murmured.

"Was not this enough to part us for ever?" he asked.

"Go on," was her only answer.

"To-day," continued Duncan Gordon, "I have heard all about the will. I have no doubt in my own mind that it is a fraudulent will, yet I almost rejoice at its existence, since it enables me to take Miss Warwick as my wife. Keep the money for which you have schemed, and, further more, let me acquit my debt to you—it was three hundred pounds. I will send you one thousand. In accepting the legacy from the late Mr. Warwick, you recognise you were engaged to become his wife, and, in contracting that engagement you necessarily released me from mine to you."

"Have you finished?" she asked with flashing eyes, "have you trampled enough on me? Have you glorified sufficiently in your righteousness and in my vice? Do you fancy that I longed for that man's wealth for myself? I, who had but one object in life, was it for myself that, having matured my schemes, I longed for his death? I who had but one date in my life, and that date not quite a year distant!"

Dr. Gordon gave a violent start. Could the suspicion, which flashed with lightning-like suddenness through his brain, be possible?

"Ah!" she continued bitterly, "is it only now you guess the secret of my scheming? Mine may have been misguided love, but it was love with no alloy of selfishness, unless it be selfishness to plot and scheme for the advancement of another. As our engagement was formed on a first offering, which had enabled you to give your talents full scope, I longed to bring you as a marriage portion sufficient to make you a rich man. I feared all along you did not really love me. I was determined to buy your love at the price even of my own soul."

"This is dreadful!" exclaimed Gordon. "You make me feel that I am in some degree your accomplice. You force on me the conviction that I am guilty in not having found you out before, and in not having protected you more fully against yourself."

"You nearly accomplished this," she returned in a soft voice. "When I spoke to you that evening at Mr. Warwick's I felt a sudden desire to come to you with no barrier of guilt between us. I am making a confession, so I need make no concealment. I may, therefore, explain that when Mr. Warwick sent for the Marshborough solicitor on some pressing business, he instructed him to draw up a deed leaving me £500.

"I discovered that this solicitor was a needy and extravagant man, and that his clerk had been a convict, whom he had taken because the man was willing to work for small wages.

"I saw this solicitor, and, by offering him a big bribe, induced him to draw up the will you have heard of, and undertook, when I sent for him for Mr. Warwick to sign, he should not be able to comprehend what he put his hand to, and should only think it was the deed leaving me £500.

"The lawyer and his clerk would witness the deed, and I knew I could make Dr. Raynham agree with anything I might say.

"Your arrival disconcerted my plans; the sight of you softened my heart. I resolved I would have the deed for £500 drawn up, and that I would give it to the lawyer to conceal the original arrangement, and that I would come to you without that blot on my conscience.

"I should have done so had I not seen you with Violet Warwick in the garden.

"My heart was then hardened—doubly hardened—for now I wished to hold her in my power."

"The explanation is sufficient," said Dr. Gordon with a shudder. "Miss Warwick shall not dispute the will. I will listen to you no longer. Go your way, I leave you to your conscience."

"And leave you to marry her!" exclaimed Miss Manton, with flashing eyes, "never, never! You shall not spurn me for her. My broken, crime-stained life lies at your door. I do not care for death; your love was my life, and without it existence is a burden. You shall never marry her!"

"See," she shouted, "I came prepared for vengeance," and she brandished in the air a revolver she drew from her bosom. "Yes, and I will have it!"

The doctor sprang towards her, but she rushed from the door and hurried up the stairs. He rapidly followed her, trusting to avert a catastrophe.

But unfortunately, Violet, hearing the race on the stairs, came to the drawing-room door and stood on the landing, and Agatha Manton, still wildly muttering to herself, aimed the weapon at the girl and fired.

Luckily the doctor had just seized her dress, which caused her to swerve, thus disturbing her aim, and the shot passed over Violet's shoulder, though she naturally shrank back with a scream.

Duncan Gordon, thinking only of Violet, and fearing she was hurt rushed towards her.

The servants were ascending the stairs, but they shrank back alarmed as the nurse turned towards them pistol in hand, and cried in a sad plaintive voice:

"All, all for love of him!"

And then suddenly turning the pistol against herself she pulled the trigger and fell back dead.

* * * * *

Twelve months passed before Duncan Gordon led Violet to the altar and made her his wife.

For several months the girl's health was in a precarious state. She was so shaken by the dreadful event that has been related that it was feared she would never recover her reason.

But youth and a naturally good constitution were at last victorious, and with health and memory came back to her mind her love for Duncan Gordon, and as soon as she was well enough, they were quietly married, and started on a long honeymoon to the beautiful South.

Later on Violet persuaded her husband to alter his mind with regard to her inheritance, and this he consented to do on condition that the money should be strictly settled on her.

THE END.

ON

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HIS DECISION.

By W. R. WILEY.

THE sun had vanished on the horizon several hours earlier, and the natural light of day had given way to such artificial light of night as Broomton could afford. This artificial light did not amount to much.

A stray lamp-post stood here and there along the main street, surmounted by a globe in which a feeble gas light flickered. As yet Broomton knew nothing of the wonders of electricity.

The shops along the thoroughfare were dark. The proprietors closed their shops early in Broomton.

The windows of many of the residences that lined the street likewise gave forth no light.

Away in the distance, at the lower end of the town, was the illuminated face of a large town clock. Lamps with brilliant reflectors produced the illumination. The small hand of this clock was at ten and the large hand at twelve.

In the general solid blackness, the light in the Blankshire Bank was especially noticeable. The light itself was not particularly bright, but the bank windows were large, and the space in front of them was not inky black. The bank itself was the only institution of its kind in Broomton. It offered its facilities not only to Broomton, but also to Blankshire county, and the annual reports showed that it was in a flourishing condition.

Within the bank was but a single figure. He had been busy with the books before him for hours and only when the office clock struck ten did he close his ledgers. He did not rise from his desk and prepare to leave the building, however. He sat there minute after minute a pained expression on his countenance. The face was not a bad one. There were lines of weakness and, in addition, lines that gave indication of a dissipated life. But, on the other hand there was an expression that led one to believe that the man was kind-hearted. John Thurston was a man of complex character. Even then his conscience was at war with the lower element of his nature.

Five weeks before his fellow clerk, the second bookkeeper in the bank, had been forced to bed. Thurston had volunteered to do the sick man's work, along with his own, to save expense. He had toiled daily at his double task without a murmur. Three days before his companion had died. That day Thurston had helped to lower him into the grave. Now he was engaged in adjusting the former bookkeeper's ledger so that all would be in readiness for the new man who was to take his friend's place. The burden of work Thurston had borne. He had uncomplainingly laboured so that his dead friend would not have ... to employ a substitute. There was a rule in the bank that men absent from duty had to pay such a substitute. Thurston had sacrificed his time to save his friend that expense. He was now contemplating whether or not he should ask his dead friend to return the favour. The man was dead, but nevertheless, he could aid him.

Thurston had led a wild life. He was a married man, and he loved his wife and children; but inherent weakness had forced him from his friends to the saloon and gaming table. At the latter he had lost. To cover his losses he had taken bank funds. The sums had been covered by expert bookkeeping. No one had suspected the theft. Why should they suspect, he reasoned. Why should they ever know the truth when the ledger of the dead bookkeeper was before him? A few strokes of his expert pen and the next examiner would declare that the dead man had died an embezzler.

Thurston sat there buried in thought. He had sacrificed his time to help his friend. Now that the latter was dead, why should not the debt of gratitude be paid? The second bookkeeper had left the land of toil; had gone either into a dreamless sleep or into a realm of eternal happiness. He could not have gone into a land of suffering; he had been too good, too pure on earth, Thurston reasoned. How, then, could the dead man be affected by any action on Thurston's part? True, his memory would not be revered; but the young man had possessed few friends and no relatives. He had been singularly alone in the world. His memory would not be revered, anyway, Thurston reasoned.

The bookkeeper's head ached under the tension, and he rose. The expression on his countenance was of abject suffering.

On the desk lay the ledgers; a few strokes of the pen would do the work. The morrow would be too late; the new clerk would then take charge of the second ledger. It would then be only a matter of a short time before the shortage was discovered. The work must be done then, or never.

Thurston paced up and down the narrow space between the railing and the wall. Surely the dead man would not mind, he said to himself. They had loved each other too much on earth. But, oh! how his conscience stung him!

Thurston, on the spur of the moment, seized the ledgers, carried them to the vault and placed them on the shelves; he then laid a hand on the knob of the iron door—and halted. If he swung the door shut and turned the combination knob, it would be too late. He could lock but not unlock. He stood there, trying to reach a decision.

He pictured in his mind his little home, not far distant from the bank, and the loving wife and children there. How they had borne with him during his dissipated life, never failing to care for or love him. Could he reward their faithfulness by wrecking their future life? Beads of hot perspiration rolled from his brow.

Then another picture rose before him. A man stood before him; the face was that of his dead friend. How the latter had pleaded with him, tried to save him from moral wreck, Heaven and he alone knew! He recalled their conversations; how the other had talked of his lonely life and said how it was his one desire to live a pure life and leave, when he died, a name untainted and spotless. He thought of the other's pleadings, tears and wish. For a moment Thurston hesitated.

Then the ponderous door shut and a rattling indicated that the combination knob was being turned.

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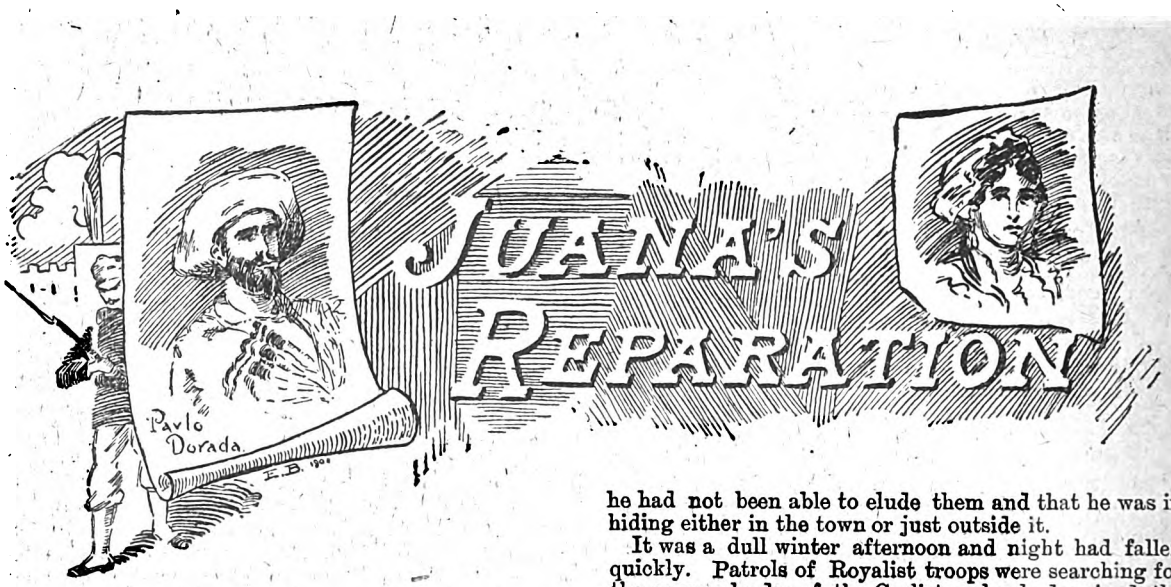

THE little Spanish town of Barasoam was in that state of commotion which one would expect to find after a desultory engagement between two small forces. In the early morning there had been an encounter—it was more than a skirmish, yet not important enough to be called a battle—between a body of Royalist troops and a band of Carlists, which had resulted in the rout of the latter.

The result of the fighting, which was not of long duration, was not pleasing to the majority of the inhabitants and non-combatants in Barasoam. They numbered a good many friends and relatives among the Carlists, the leader of whom was young Pavlo Dorada, a native of the town, who had thrown in his lot with the followers of Don Carlos some six months previously.

Dorada, although following the humble occupation of shoemaker, was a man of more ambitious ideas than his fellows; he had educated himself much above his position, a thing not very common among Spaniards a quarter of a century ago, and he chafed at the backward condition of his country, longing for a better form of government and determined to seize the first opportunity of assisting in the work of raising Spain once again to her former proud position. He believed that the Carlists' rising was the opportunity he sought, and he threw himself into the struggle with all his ardour of youth and ambition.

There were two persons in the little town who were more interested in Pavlo Dorada than the rest of the inhabitants; these persons were Marita Gomez and Juana Mestre. The former was an orphan, as was Dorada himself, and the latter was the daughter of Manuel Mestre, the Alcande, a staunch supporter of the Royalist cause and a man of some importance. Both Marita and Juana were little more than twenty-two years of age.

The rout of the Carlists had been complete; a large proportion of the little band had been taken prisoners, many had been killed and the others had succeeded in effecting their escape by flight. Dorada was not among the killed or the prisoners; the supposition was that he was one of the fugitives and had got clear of the neighbourhood, but the Royalists held the opinion that he had not been able to elude them and that he was in hiding either in the town or just outside it.

It was a dull winter afternoon and night had fallen quickly. Patrols of Royalist troops were searching for the young leader of the Carlists, who had gained the reputation of possessing considerable influence over the rank and file of the "insurgents," and whose capture was consequently very desirable. But if the leaders of the Royalist troops were anxious to prevent the escape of Dorada, the men—tired and hungry—were not so eager for the work and did not trouble to keep fully on the alert.

Hence it came about that the slight figure of a young woman was allowed to pass a post at the further end of the town without being challenged. Once clear of the watchers, the girl hurried forward at a rapid pace until she reached a tumble-down cottage almost hidden in a dip of the ground.

In response to her tap on the door, she was bidden to enter. She opened the door cautiously and went inside, closing the door carefully behind her and locking it. As she turned with a half-uttered inquiry, she was clasped in two strong arms by a young man who kissed her and addressed her in endearing terms.

"Oh, Pavlo, it is so imprudent of you to be here, in this room, within sight of anyone who may force an entrance," she cried, when the first embrace was over. "Why do you not keep in safety underground?"

"Like a rat!" he exclaimed bitterly. Then, assuming a lighter tone, he continued: "Yes, I know it is safer, but you must not think that I have lost all sense of prudence. I knew that you would try to see me before I stole away in the darkness across country to rejoin my friends. I have left my hiding-place every few minutes since it grew dark in order to listen for your coming."

"Old Anna brought me word that you were here," replied Marita, in answer to a former question. "She is a faithful soul and loves you as though you were her son; if it were known that she had helped you, it would go hard with her."

"Bless her!" said Pavlo gratefully.

Then the lovers fell to talking quietly of future prospects. They dared not have a light, and the little window was guarded by a shutter, so that they sat in perfect darkness.

"It will be impossible for me to remain in dear old Spain," said Pavlo sadly. "A lie has been spread abroad concerning me by some enemy; it is said that I am in

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league with the Royalists and have given them such information as has enabled them to upset the Carlist plans and inflict two or three severe defeats upon us—that I am merely keeping with them in order to be better able to assist those who are trying to crush them. Only last night I received a message from headquarters to answer 'a grave charge'—so the note ran—and the messenger, who is a friend of mine, told me more about him. From him I gathered that if I reported myself I should surely be shot as a traitor."

"Oh, Pavlo," cried the girl indignantly.

"I have no doubt that it is true, what this friend tells me," returned Pavlo: "so I appear to be doomed, anyhow, unless I can get clear of the country. If the Royalists get me, I can expect no mercy at their hands; and if I am taken to the Carlist headquarters, death awaits me with equal certainty. You know that I have been lenient to defeated foes; this has not pleased some of the chiefs, and, in addition, false evidence has been given against me in other respects. The note which was delivered to me last night commanded me to retire at once from the leadership of my contingent, and hand it over to my lieutenant; but I declined to do so, for I knew that quite half the men would refuse to serve under him. We were outnumbered and beaten; that again is against me.'

"But what will you do?" asked Marita anxiously.

"Make my way across country to the French Frontier as well as I can. I detest the idea of sneaking away, but if I cannot be of use now, it is well that I should try to preserve my life in the hope that it may be useful to my country at some future date."

They conversed in subdued tones for some minutes, Pavlo entering into an account of the manner in which he hoped to escape the vigilance of his enemies and reach French territory, Marita counselling him as best she could and giving some valuable information concerning the whereabouts of the Royalists. She had brought a small sum of money with her, and this she handed to Pavlo to serve him on the way.

"I do not like to take it from you," he protested. "It is the result of your hard work."

"You must take it, Pavlo," she cried energetically. "You will want money and——"

Crash! Crash!

The lovers clasped each other in dismay as the door flew open under the force of a heavy blow, and, at the same time, the back wooden wall of the cottage was broken in by the same process. Pavlo had no time to make any defence before he was surrounded by men wearing the Royalist uniform, who rushed in through the open door and through the breach at the back of the cottage.

He was surrounded, Marita was dragged from him, and he was bound hand and foot despite his struggles. Marita, half-mad with fear and anxiety concerning her lover's fate, struggled desperately to liberate herself from the man who held her, and he had to appeal to one of his comrades for assistance to restrain her.

Some of the soldiers carried torches, and these lighted up the interior with a weird illumination. Marita saw that the case was hopeless; there was no possible escape for her lover; so, with a wail of despair, she gave up the struggle and remained quiet except for her sobs.

Then there entered through the door a second female figure, slightly taller than Marita and less graceful, less simple in appearance than Pavlo's sweetheart. She stepped to the centre of the room and stood with clenched hands and gleaming eyes, in a position where she could see and be seen by both the lovers.

"Lovemaking is dangerous in such times as these—it may lead to discovery!" she said in a mocking tone.

"Juana!" gasped Marita. "She has betrayed you!"

"Fiend!" exclaimed Pavlo, his anger getting the better of him for a moment. "It is you who have betrayed me!"

"You had in your power a few months ago to make me an angel; you rejected my love—why complain because, by so doing, you turned me into the opposite?" Juana laughed shrilly; there was a trace of hysteria in her voice. "It was your turn then, and you refused to listen to me; I could have given you money and a better position, but you would not listen to me. Now it is my turn, and how ever much you plead, you will not succeed in gaining a hearing!"

And again she laughed, this time with a laugh of triumph.

He stood before a long table, facing the five men who were to pronounce his doom.

IT.

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"I shall plead for nothing!" replied Pavlo, quiet again. Turning to his captors, he said: "Take me away. I won't hear another word, if I can help it. Good-bye, Marita; think of me!"

To tell the truth, the soldiers were disgusted, rough and passionate as they themselves were, at Juana's conduct, and they took their prisoner into the open without waiting for the officer's command.

The soldiers released Marita with a warning not to attempt to follow, and the two girls were left together in the little room, lighted by a small candle which one of the men had found on a shelf.

"Oh, why have you done this wicked thing?" moaned Marita, clasping her hands in agony. "You have destroyed him!"

"You now know, both of you, that a woman's hate can be as strong as her love," sneered Juana. "He rejected my affection and bestowed his upon you—you, a woman of weakness, without the strength of passion, which, whether for love or hate, makes a real woman. How can a woman make a man happy, help him in his efforts, when her blood runs as coldly as yours? Yet he scorned my love and turned to you!"

"He never scorned you!" said Marita, quietly. "He loves me, so he had no love to give you. He did not seek your affection, and he is not to be blamed for—for what happened."

There was logic in this, but the offended pride of Juana Mestre would not allow her to recognise it. She burst into a torrent of harsh words and threats against Pavlo and the girl who stood before her, and only ceased when her breath failed her. Then she stood panting and with clenched hands, looking like a veritable fury.

Marita did not reply; she understood the passionate nature of the women in that part of Spain, and how quickly one feeling can give place to another; she herself was not entirely free from this failing, and her woman's wit was working swiftly on an idea which had flashed across her mind. Juana was the daughter of one of the men who would probably act as judges in the trial of Pavlo—he would have some sort of a trial, no doubt. She was handsome, and her influence over the opposite sex was not inconsiderable; if her changeful nature could be brought to make another turn, she might effect the salvation of the man whom she had just betrayed into the hands of his enemies. "If I appeal to her love for Pavlo, I may reach her heart and induce her to help him," so ran Marita's thoughts.

"You have done your worst," she said addressing Juana; "his life is at stake, and that is your work. Just now you reproached me for not being a woman, as you understood the term, but it is you who are not a true woman. When one of our sex loves truly, that love endures for ever; it cannot change, even man's coldness and cruelty are powerless to affect it. Pavlo has not wronged you in anyway—you know it in your heart, you cannot deny it, but you have allowed your vanity to get the better of your love. I love him, and if he were to throw me off at this moment, I would still remain faithful to him and would be ready to lay down my life to save him. Which of us is the true woman? I tell you, your affection for him is hollow—it is a sham, a mockery! If it were not so, you would not have followed me in order to discover his hiding-place and betray him. You would be moving Heaven and earth to save him. You do not, you never did, love him!"

It would be difficult to describe the varying emotions which filled the breast of Juana as she listened to this tirade; her breath came harder, she clenched her hands until the nails cut into the flesh, her whole body swayed as if moved by a strong wind when Marita had finished.

"It's a lie!" she screamed. "I love him," repeated Juana. "I will prove it. I will save him!"

And before Marita could say another word, Juana had rushed from the cottage into the darkness.

The Royalists intended to make short work of Pavlo Dorada, whom they recognised as exerting a powerful influence on the Carlists in that district. He was taken at once to the small municipal building in order to be interrogated rather than tried.

He stood before a long table, facing the five men who were to pronounce his doom; three of them were army officers, the fourth was Manuel Mestre, and the fifth occupied a Government post in Madrid.

"We need waste no time in useless formalities," said Colonel Rodriguez, who had assumed the position of chief judge by virtue of his military rank. "You know your fate, Dorada. There is, however, one chance of escape from death. You possess, without doubt, much information that will be valuable to us; give us that information and you shall go free."

The others assented to this proposition by murmurs of approval, but the prisoner smiled disdainfully. He made no attempt to reply, and his judges rightly interpreted his silence as a refusal.

"Why should you hesitate to tell us what you know?" urged Rodriguez. "Your own friends are against you and mean to shoot you; we have learnt so much through our friend here"—pointing to the official from Madrid—"and this is confirmed by the note found on you. Seeing that they have thus turned upon you in spite of your services to the Carlist cause, you should have no reluctance to save your life by throwing over those who have turned upon you."

But Pavlo was unmoved by this specious reasoning.

"Never! If my friends act dishonourably, that does not excuse a dishonourable action on my part."

"But you have everything to gain, nothing to lose!" urged Rodriguez again.

"Father, he must be saved, you must not allow him to be shot!" cried the voice of Juana at this juncture. She pushed her way through the guards, and stood by the side of the prisoner. "He has fought fairly—and—I love him!"

This interruption, rendered more strange by the excited appearance of Mestre's daughter, caused much commotion among the five men. Mestre arose with an angry exclamation.

"My daughter"—his voice softened as he spoke, for he idolized his only child—"what you ask is impossible. You are not serious."

"There is only one chance for the prisoner," interposed Rodriguez coldly. "He knows what that is."

"You will do it?" asked Juana, who had heard the condition, turning appealingly to Pavlo. "You will ——"

"I would never do anything so dishonourable, not even to save my life!" returned Pavlo firmly.

"You are mad!" cried Juana. "But you shall no

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kill him, I will not let you! You will have to kill me first!" she exclaimed, turning to Rodriguez, who only smiled contemptuously at her vehement declaration.

"My child, you must retire," said Mestre, in response to a few harsh words from the Colonel.

But Juana refused to leave, and when three soldiers approached to take her away at the command of Rodriguez, she threw her arms about Dorada and clung to him.

In spite of her cries and protestations, she was taken

The soldiers had fired in return and had stormed the thicket.

from the chamber and conducted to her home, whither her father immediately followed, leaving his colleagues to decide the fate of the prisoner.

Mestre was much relieved to find that Juana's excitement had subsided and that she had grown quite calm; this sudden change did not cause him surprise, for he quite understood his daughter's erratic temperament. So quite understood his daughter's erratic temperament. So calm had she become that she was not even moved by the news, which reached them a little later, that Dorada was to be shot at sunrise.

During the evening, although the night was cold, she went for a walk; she was absent for nearly two hours, but she gave no explanation when she returned and Mestre deemed it advisable not to ask for one.

He would have been much less easy in his mind had he known that Juana had had a long talk with Marita and afterwards with a soldier whom she had bribed to procure two or three rifles and some ammunition.

Dorada, firm and erect, but looking somewhat pale and haggard, was led from his improvised cell to the spot just outside the town where he was to meet his fate. Half-a-dozen of his comrades had been sent to their last account on the same spot during the preceding afternoon.

Although it was generally known among the people where the execution would take place, none ventured near the ground, for a warning proclamation had been issued by the Royalists, and everyone was afraid of being arrested on suspicion of being a Carlist if found near this little strip of ground when Dorada should be placed with his face to the hedge and his back to the firing party.

There was no ceremony. Dorada's hands were bound close to his sides, and his eyes were left unbound as he was not to face the soldiers.

No priest was in attendance to comfort him in his last moments, and his resting-place was to be the ditch into which he might look if he chose, with some dead branches or a few spadefuls of earth to cover him.

The doomed man turned his eyes upwards and breathed a prayer to Heaven on his behalf and for the future welfare of Marita. It would soon be over, he thought; and then he forgot himself and reflected, like a true patriot, on the future of his country. "Poor Spain!"

He heard, as if at a great distance, the commands of the sergeant in charge of the firing party. Then—and, even in his semi-conscious state, he fancied that they came too quickly and irregularly—he heard two reports. He felt no shock, and he waited for the others, but there seemed to be some commotion. Some more shots. Still he was unhurt.

"Quick!" said a voice, which he recognised as familiar, yet could not remember to whom it belonged. "Jump the ditch and I will help you. Quick, Pavlo, for Heaven's sake!"

He leapt across the ditch and, his hands being bound, he fell against the thorns, cutting his face. A small hand grasped him by the arm, and the next moment he felt that his hands were free. He half-pushed himself through the hedge, some of which had been cut away, and was half-dragged through it; on the other side he found himself face to face with Marita.

The girl hurried him away and vouchafed no word of explanation till they were within the wood half-a-mile away.

Then she told him what had happened, without, however, stopping in their flight.

Juana had evolved a desperate scheme for saving

WITHOUT

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Pavlo. She knew where the execution would take place, and had arranged to take up her position in a thicket to the left, from which she could command a view of the firing party, and from this point she would discharge two or three rifles at the opportune moment.

The object of this manœvure was to make the soldiers believe that they were being attacked by a rescue party; they would, so Juana hoped, immediately turn their attention from Dorada to these assailants and discharge their rifles at the thicket, probably making a rush at it afterwards.

While Juana was doing this, Marita was to cut Pavlo's bonds and hurry him away. The original plan was that Marita should hide in the ditch or somewhere near her lover, but this proved to be an impossibility, and she had to keep on the farther side.

The plan had worked admirably. The desultory fire from the thicket had had the desired effect; the soldiers had fired in return and, forgetting their prisoner for the time, had stormed the thicket.

That was all Marita could tell him; she could only shake her head in reply to Pavlo's questions concerning the safety of Juana.

"She told me that when she had done her part—I was to do mine without thinking of her — she would hold me responsible for your safety and that the vengeance of Heaven would fall upon me if I failed to carry out her instructions."

Pavlo was loath to continue his flight with the uncertainty of Juana's fate tormenting him, but Marita pointed out that it would be utterly impossible for him to do anything, and that he would be nullifying the sacrifice if he were to go back and fall into the hands of his enemies.

So they went on, hiding by day and travelling by night until they reached French territory and were safe.

It was a long time before they learnt what they desired to know, but at length a badly-written letter from Anna, to whom they had succeeded in conveying their address, together with the announcement of their marriage, gave them the details.

When the men of the firing party reached the thicket, which they pluckily "rushed," apparently at the risk of being riddled with bullets, they found a woman lying on the ground and bleeding from a wound in the chest. By her side lay a rifle, while two other rifles were fixed in the thicket with their muzzles pointed in the direction where the men had stood.

The sergeant, kneeling beside the dying woman, recognised Juana, whom he had seen in the council chamber.

"Is he gone? Has he escaped?" she gasped, with an appealing glance. "Oh, let him escape; I love him!"

The faces of the soldiers lost their hard expression. Juana noticed the softened look, and a faint smile played over her lips.

"He will be free! I have saved him!"

And those were her last words.

A PUPIL in the juvenile department astonished his teacher recently by describing a circle as "A straight line that's crooked all the way round."

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DOUBT

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DETECTIVE V. BARRISTER

I.

A Tricky Lawyer's Tricky Game.

"John Connelly!"

Before the echo of the clerk's voice was lost in the silence of the court-room, the prisoner stepped briskly forward. He was young, flashily-dressed and his face was not a pleasant one. It would have delighted a student of Lombroso, with its prominent cheek-bones, and small rat's eyes twinkling in sunken sockets, and the narrow forehead.

There is always something pathetic in the spectacle of the human animal brought to bay, but one would have to be weakly sentimental to stir up any sympathy for this creature.

The man was up for burglary. The judge upon this bench had the reputation of giving long sentences for this crime, and as the present case was an especially bad one, the man would get, more than likely, fifteen years. That would practically consume the best years of his life. He would be an old man when he came out.

A plea of not guilty was entered and the Q.C. for the prosecution arose to address the court.

"The man who stands at the bar," he said, "has had a bad career for ten years, though he has never suffered a longer term of imprisonment than a few months, for each of the many offences of which he has been convicted.

"His last crime is the worst of which he has been guilty, and he deserves the fullest sentence the law will allow, for he is a murderer at heart, and his victim escaped only by a miracle.

"Judge for yourselves, gentlemen," addressing the jury directly, "the gravity of his crime.

"On the night of August 17th of last year he burglariously entered the house of a worthy and highly-respected citizen of Fulham, the Hon. George Catling.

"Mr Catling had drawn a large sum of money from the bank on the previous day, and the prisoner had doubtlessly obtained the information in some way. This money was chiefly in banknotes. The man obtained entrance to the house by a window in the second storey over the porch. He is what is known as an expert 'second-storey' thief.

"Gaining access to Mr. Catling's room, he noiselessly ransacked the private desk without disturbing the sleeping occupant. He came at last upon an iron strong-box in which he rightly thought the money was placed.

"He picked the lock, had secured the contents, and was about to make his exit from the room, when Mr. Catling, awaking suddenly, though he does not remember from what cause, realizing that someone was in the room, leapt instantly to the floor.

"The burglar extinguished his lantern and made a dash for the door, but Mr. Catling's first act had been to switch on the electric light, and before the villain had reached the door he had grappled with him.

"A short but terrible struggle followed. The burglar knew that the noise would soon cause help to arrive on the scene and, determined to gain his freedom even at the price of murder, he struck at his victim with a jemmy he carried.

"It was the merest chance that the blow was not instantly fatal. As it was it rendered Mr. Catling unconscious, and the murderous fiend escaped with his ill-gotten gain.

"The household was aroused, and it was the prompt attention Mr. Catling received that went far to saving his life. Mr. Catling has quite recovered and will appear as a witness. He has already identified the prisoner at the bar.

"I shall also have as a witness one of the servants, Maggie Todd, who was the first to arrive upon the scene of the struggle and saw the burglar disappear out of the house.

"This woman I shall also put into the box, and shall prove to you that she had been engaged to the prisoner, but broke with him because of his bad character. This witness gave the man's name to the police, which aided them in capturing the man, whom upon arrest she immediately identified."

"I object!" exclaimed the counsel for the defence.

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"Have you any proof of it?"

"We have the girl herself," replied the counsel for the prosecution.

"Then let her testify to that effect. But I object to that assertion before she has done so."

The counsel for the prosecution instantly detected some new and unexpected development on the part of the defence. What it was he learnt later to his temporary chagrin.

"I waive the point," he replied.

About midnight I was awakened by a bright light shining in my face.

He looked about the court room for Maggie Todd. He knew she had been in the custody of an officer, but now he could not see her.

"The prisoner," he concluded "denied the crime. The money, four thousand two hundred and seventy-five pounds, has never been traced. These are the facts of the case, and your duty you know. Such crimes are the most dangerous that beset society, and must be severely dealt with."

The counsel for the prosecution sat down, and the jury fixed their attention upon the prisoner in a way that boded no good for him.

But he was putting up a good bluff. He wore a pleasant expression, at any rate as pleasant as his face would permit. He had been out on bail until two weeks before the time for his trial, when he had been surrendered.

The first witness was Mr. Charles Baker, a nephew of Mr. Catling. He lived with the latter, and he testified as to the money having been in the house, and of his having seen his uncle put it away in the strong-box on the night of the burglary. He had not seen the burglar, but was next to arrive on the scene after Maggie Todd, and further testified to having examined the box in which the money had been placed, and that it was gone. This was all his evidence was intended to show.

Then Lewis Levingham for the defence leapt to his feet.

"Do you of your own knowledge know anything that connects the prisoner with this crime?"

"I do not," was the reply.

Levingham sat down with a smile of triumph, and Robert Abney, counsel for the prosecution, deigned a withering and contemptuous glance at his unworthy opponent. How they did hate each other! Levingham was a scoundrel, and there was no question about it; but his brother barristers had no means of convicting him of anything that would enable them to have him disqualified, though they watched him closely always. Nineteen out of every twenty benchers openly loathed the man, some had gone so far as to have him shadowed in the hope of getting incriminating evidence against him. But he was as sharp as the criminals whom he invariably defended.

Maggie was called next, and there was a little stir when it was found that she was not present. Abney felt a momentary alarm. Had she been spirited away in the interests of the defence?

His fears were allayed, however, almost immediately, by the girl's appearance. She was at once called to the witness box.

"Miss Todd, I want you to tell what you know of the burglary at the house of Mr. Catling," said the prosecuting counsel.

Levingham was on his feet again in an instant.

"May I ask your lordship to rule that the witness need not reply unless she wishes to," he said.

"Why not?" exclaimed Abney.

"Because she is the prisoner's wife," was the mocking reply.

"Is this true?" asked Abney addressing the witness.

"Yes, sir. I married him three weeks ago yesterday."

The proofs of this were presented and found correct.

They had been married while the prisoner was out on bail.

The court officers looked at each other in an amazed way.

"That's another of Levingham's sharp tricks," they said.

There was no compelling her to testify against her husband and she was at once ordered to step down.

The prosecution was temporarily embarrassed, but soon rallied and called Mr. Catling.

MOST

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That gentleman had not altogether recovered from the effects of that night, or else he was suffering from a relapse. He was pale and looked ill, and he carried an ugly scar across his forehead, where he had been struck the night of the burglary.

Mr. Catling's story was slow and uncertain at all times, but he described the events of that night substantially as Abney had set them forth at the beginning.

The prisoner looked somewhat nervous at his recital, but Levingham rubbed his hands, took snuff copiously, and appeared generally delightfully at ease.

"Now, Mr. Catling," said Abney, "answer this: Have you seen the burglar since his assault upon you?"

"I have," was the faint reply.

"Look upon the prisoner and tell me whether he is the man."

Mr. Catling became pale, put his hand to his head, as if in pain, and trembling visibly seemed scarcely able to proceed.

"I—I don't know," he said. "I—I——" he groaned, and an attendant went to his assistance.

Abney was in a rage, but he concealed it admirably.

If Mr. Catling could not identify the prisoner the prosecution would fail, and the man would be acquitted. It would seriously affect his reputation.

What could have caused this change in Mr. Catling?

He had been absolutely positive of his identification after the man's arrest.

He temporized and gained some time, and tried to draw from the gentleman something that would explain this remarkable change, but without result. After another attempt to get him to charge the prisoner as his assailant and the burglar, and identify him, he faltered, "I don't know," and this settled the case.

The prisoner was acquitted, and walked out of the court with his counsel, holding his head unnecessarily jauntily.

Abney was terribly enraged at the way things had gone. He knew that the two men who went out together were as black-hearted a pair of rogues as ever lived—and he couldn't prove it!

II.

GETTING THE SCENT.

I HAD witnessed the whole proceeding, and when I got an opportunity I suggested to Mr. Abney that he should try and run them down.

"But how?" he exclaimed.

"Bart Hocking," I remarked laconically.

"Hocking? Hocking?" replied Abney dubiously.

"The cleverest detective in the kingdom," I answered.

"Oh, ah, he who got at the bottom of that Regent Street jewel robbery. A clever young chap. I—believe —I—will!"

"It would be well to see him at once," I suggested.

"Yes. Do you know where to find him? Telephone or wire to him to come at once, if possible."

Bart happened to be at home, and I was put into communication with him. I told him a few facts of the case, and he consented to take it up at once. The name Levingham had settled it.

He had a score to settle with him. Although he lived in Streatham, Bart agreed to see Abney in forty-five minutes. He arrived two minutes before the time set. It was a rule with Bart to be always before time. On this trifle rested many a success.

Abney, meantime, had taken Mr. Catling to his offices, and detained him until the arrival of Bart.

If anybody knew how to handle a nervous man, and one in the present state of Mr Catling, that being was Bart Hocking.

The man approached Bart and whispered: "All clear."

The first thing he did was to talk about the new production Mr. Tree was staging. Then he suggested a stroll, and he took Abney and Catling out for a walk, led them down to the Embankment, talked about the gulls to be seen on the Thames, and admired the peculiar atmospheric effect which lighted up the river façade of Somerset House. They turned into Horse Guards Avenue, and so into Whitehall, and then to the Ship Tavern where he led them to a table and they were soon enjoying a dinner.

Towards the end of it Mr. Catling was quite himself, and he was ready to be led to anything Bart wished him to do.

Meanwhile, Abney had been making a study of the

ENTRANCING

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young detective, and had been charmed and edified at the wonderful magnetism he displayed, and his amazing knowledge of everything under the sun.

"Levingham, eh?" said Bart, with a chuckle and a smile when they had come to talk about the case. "Bad as they make 'em. I am glad to have a case in which he figures. But come now," this direct to Mr. Catling, "was the prisoner Connelly the same as the burglar who assaulted you?"

"He was," replied Mr. Catling.

Abney looked amazed and perhaps a little angry.

"I know my conduct to-day has been unmanly, Mr. Abney," explained Mr. Catling, "but I hope you will make allowances. I seemed to be under a spell of some kind, and I broke down through sheer cowardice—fear!"

"Fear!" cried Abney. "Not of the prisoner?"

"No. But of the man who gave me this." He pointed to the scar upon his head.

Abney was speechless.

Bart was listening intently. He had got the man to talk, now it would come out with the occasional aid of a word or two.

"I broke down in court to-day because I believed Connelly to be innocent. I knew he was, and yet dared not say so."

"But you were positive he was the man a week ago!"

"Just so. And now I am equally sure he is innocent."

"But when did you arrive at this conclusion?"

"Last night. Listen to me. I went to bed as usual. About midnight I was awakened by a bright light shining in my face. I tried to start up, but felt something cold at my throat and knew it to be a knife."

"'The slightest sound and I finish you,' said the man who bent over me. It was a powerful electric light he held in his hand, and I could see him distinctly, for he bent his face close to mine so that I should see it in the light of the lantern he held. It was the face of the man with whom I had my death struggle months ago."

"The burglar!" exclaimed Abney.

"Yes, it was the same man. I could never mistake him. The prisoner resembled him closely, it is true, but it is clearly a case of mistaken identity."

"My midnight visitor held the sharp edge of a razor to my throat as he leant over me and whispered hoarsely: 'You are going to back out at the last moment, you pigeon-livered fossil, and swear that Connelly is not the man. I know your game. But don't you do it. He has got to go up in my place, do you understand? I don't want to be hunted by the police, and if he goes up I shall be left in peace. He's innocent, but no matter, he's got to go up, and if you don't convict him, you will find me at your bedside one night, and I'll finish you just so, with this razor. Now you understand.'

"Look here," Mr. Catling raised his chin and showed a raw line around his throat where the razor had been made to cut through the skin. "You see it is no nightmare I'm telling you. I've got that to remember his visit by.

"The man took his departure suddenly, and I instantly aroused the house, and Mr. Baker was in my room, when the front door closed behind the midnight visitor. I told him what had happened, and I regret to think that he counselled me to testify against Connelly to protect myself. It has been a horrible, crushing thought to me. I wanted to tell the truth in the box, but could not. I have done so now, but I know I shall pay for it with my life, unless you can catch the right man, Mr. Hocking. Guard myself as I may, that man will yet stand beside my bed, and I shall awake to meet death with his knife."

"I wish you would let me have the number of those bank notes," said Bart, taking out a vest pocket memorandum book.

"The first man that moves gets a taste of lead," said Bart.

Mr. Catling produced his pocket-book and handed a slip therefrom to the detective, the numbers were soon copied.

"Find the money, and half of it is yours, Mr. Hocking," said Mr. Catling, generously.

"Thank you," replied Bart. "I hope to get it and the man too. Go to your home, Mr. Catling, without any fear whatever. Rest assured that your house is in my care and no one can enter to do you harm."

"It is a comforting thought, Mr. Hocking," rejoined Mr. Catling, "and I feel safe already."

NOVEL

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When, a little later, the three men emerged from the Ship Tavern, Mr. Catling hailed a cab and was driven home.

The detective and the Q.C. went towards Charing Cross, where they turned into the Strand, both very silent for some little time.

"What do you think about the story of the midnight visitor?" asked Abney at last.

"I think—it is—all right," replied Hocking in slow, measured tones.

"It wasn't a nightmare?"

"No. I believe it happened and I am going to base my searches somewhat upon that event. At present it is the most mysterious and difficult phase of the subject."

"What is your opinion about the prisoner may I ask?"

"He is acquitted and is out of our power, since he cannot be tried for this charge again," replied Bart, "but I intend to give him a little personal attention. Yet if he is innocent why should Levingham patch up that hasty marriage between him and the girl? Levingham is a scoundrel and I'll brand him with a broad arrow, yet."

"I'm glad to hear that you know something of the man's real character. I know it is as black as the ace of spades, but he is too shrewd to be caught. I wish you could get sufficient evidence against him to have him suspended. At present he is a disgrace to the bar."

Bart nodded.

"I'll call on you, if I get hold of anything interesting," he said.

"By all means, any hour of the day or night," replied Abney producing a card.

"I know your house in Berkeley Square well," said Bart smiling, for there was not a prominent man in London, whose business and private address were unknown to the detective. What is more, with most of them he knew at what hour they were most likely to be found at either place.

The two men parted at Southampton Street, Bart going towards and crossing Covent Garden market, and threading his way through the maze of narrow and dirty streets beyond.

III.

THE TRAP THAT WAS LAID AND SPRUNG.

Two days passed, and nothing happened to the principals in this case. At least nothing that was known to all of them. It had almost passed from Mr. Abney's mind, in the stress of business, and Mr. Catling's friends made his life as bright and cheerful as they could. But with Bart it was different. A good deal had happened, though it was known only to him.

Towards nine o'clock on the evening of the second day after the meeting of the three men in the Ship Tavern, a closed carriage drove up to the Abney house in Berkeley Square. Bart Hocking ran quickly up the steps, and to the servant who opened the door, handed a card which he had produced while waiting for the door to be opened after his ring.

The next moment Abney came forward holding Bart's card. The distinguished barrister was dressed and just ready to go out.

"If you can spare the time, come," said Bart. "And you can be in at the death; my carriage is waiting. You shall see a pretty evening's work."

Abney at once assented and the two men went out together and entered the carriage.

"St. Martin's le Grand, quick," said Bart to the driver, and away they rattled.

Not a word came from Bart as to where they were going or what was to happen. He discussed chiefly the latest plays the theatres had produced.

In front of the Post Office they both got out and Bart led the way towards Smithfield market. To find one's way about the narrow streets was more than puzzle enough, the barrister thought; to be able to trace a criminal to his lair in such a neighbourhood must require almost second sight.

Suddenly Bart stopped before the entrance to a house that was dark as Erebus. Opening a door with a key he produced, the two men stood inside in a dark hallway.

The barrister was vaguely conscious that there was a third person present with whom Bart had held two or three words of conversation in a whisper.

"It's all right," said Bart, in a low voice to Abney, then to someone else he said: "Let's have a sparkle, Catty."

From out of the darkness a faint ray of light shone ahead.

It was a ray from a dark lantern held by the invisible third person, whom Bart had addressed as Catty.

Bart took Abney's arm so as to guide him and prevent, if possible, any stumbling. They climbed three flights of stairs in the house, which seemed to be empty, and when they reached the top floor a little more light was brought to bear, and Bart pointed the way to the roof, which was reached by a ladder.

"What's all this?" asked Abney.

"We've got to get into a building two houses off," explained Bart, "that's what this means. It isn't safe to try to get an entrance in any other way, for if but a door or window is touched the fox in his den knows it."

The three went up on the roof and over another roof to the third building, where it was necessary to ascend a rope ladder in order to reach the roof, as it was somewhat higher than the other buildings.

When they got on the top of this, Abney detected the outline of a man against the black sky.

He approached Bart with the silence of a wraith, and whispered, "All clear."

It was necessary for the four men to descend through the fanlight of the other building which had been removed, and to descend two stories. Before doing this Bart had produced some sort of a covering for the feet; it was a felt slipper, which Abney put over his shoes, The others were already so protected.

The house was in darkness as they made their way down two flights of stairs. Then on the second story there was a ray of light visible in the hallway. It was seen to come from the transom over a door half-way down the hall.

Bart had already given full instructions in whispers, before they had descended to this floor. They moved now with noiseless tread and stood before the door. The transom had been covered with a cloth at one time but this had fallen away slightly at one corner, and gave a peep into the room.

Catty locked his hands and held them before him and Abney put his foot into them. He was raised from the ground with as much ease as he would have lifted a two-

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year-old child. He marvelled at the strength of the man who held him without a tremor. Then he put his eye to the opening and beheld—Levingham and Connelly!

There was a third man, but his back was turned to the door.

Only a great effort prevented Abney making an exclamation.

The men within were talking excitedly.

Levingham swore copiously.

"I won't yield a penny," he exclaimed. "It was agreed that I was to have half, and you two divide the remainder. I've done good work in this case and I'm entitled to it."

"Not a bit of it," cried Connelly, huskily, "a third's all you'll get."

Part of the money lay on the table. It was the half that Levingham had counted out for the two men. The other half he had safely in his pocket.

They argued and swore, and almost came to blows over the matter, when Catty put Abney down safely, and raised Bart instead. The detective held a revolver in one hand, and, with the other deftly moved the transom. It was one of the kind that worked on a sort of axle set in the centre at each side, so that as he raised it, he rested his hand on the top of the door and steadied his pistol.

"The first man that moves gets a taste of lead," said Bart, in calm, even tones. "Steady! Keep still or I fire!" This last admonition was yelled at the men as they started suddenly upon the first sound of his voice.

They stood two of them glaring at that shining pistol, the third had not dared to turn his head. They knew that it was the voice of Bart Hocking they heard, and their faces became livid with rage as they realized they were trapped.

Bart's assistant put a jemmy in the door and with a crash it quickly yielded; then, as he entered the room, he covered the men with a revolver, while Bart got down and entered the room with Catty and the barrister.

It was then the third man was seen face to face, and it brought an exclamation from Abney.

"Henry Harton!" he exclaimed.

"You know him, I see," remarked Bart significantly.

"Certainly, he is one of the turnkeys at Newgate."

"Does the fact enlighten you at all as to the mystery?" asked Bart.

"No."

"Then I will explain. It is through this man's connivance that the prisoner has been able to be out of prison whenever he chose. It was in this way he visited Mr. Catling at midnight, when it was supposed he was in prison. The two burglars were really the one man. Catty, secure the prisoners and the money. Call out the number of the notes and I'll see if they compare with these."

Bart referred to his note book.

They were found all right.

The legal instinct was not crushed in Levingham, even if he was in a bad hole, and he exclaimed:

"But you cannot arrest my client, he has been acquitted."

"Bah!" said Bart, contemptuously, "then I arrest him for being in bad company. But I've got a worse charge than that. I arrest you, Henry Connelly, for the murder of the Hon. George Catling!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Levingham.

"Not in the case in which you are concerned," returned Bart, drily, "he died this evening at 7.30 from the effects of complications which set up in the wound he received."

The three men were soon safely under lock and key, and Bart, after giving his two assistants some instructions, got into a cab with the barrister and was driven to his town residence, which consisted of a suite of rooms in Whitehall Court.

Abney, at the detective's request, accompanied him, and the two talked over the clever capture, for about an hour.

"How, Mr. Hocking, did you ever achieve such a result in so short a time? Is the method of your work a professional secret?" asked the barrister, in unmistakable admiration.

"No," replied Bart, modestly. "I don't mind telling you. This case was particularly easy, which seldom happens, and it was so because of Mr. Catling's second visitation by the burglar.

"A detective's work is largely a matter of skilful deduction, as you no doubt are aware. In this case Mr. Catling had identified Connelly as the burglar. At the trial he did not deny it, and also he did not affirm it. When he made his confession to us, the first solution to the mystery to my mind was to determine whether Connelly was his midnight visitor in both instances, or whether there was another man. If the latter then undoubtedly Connelly was innocent. He was confined in Newgate, therefore it was necessary for me to know whether it was possible for him to be absent from that institution when he should not have been.

"It was a simple matter to find who had been his keeper in prison. Shadowing this man led me to Connelly, and keeping the latter in view led to Levingham, and of course the whole thing was as simple as A B C."

"But how about Connelly on his second visit threatening Mr. Catling as he did? Would it not have seemed the wisest course for him to have threatened the man's life if he had testified against the prisoner in court?" asked Abney.

"Not with such shrewd customers as these," replied Bart, to whom all men's minds were as an open book. "The scheme was, no doubt, one of Levingham's own. He figured rightly that Mr. Catling had a conscience and that if he believed the prisoner innocent nothing could compel him to testify to send the man to the penitentiary even to save his own throat from the knife of the midnight assassin."

"Remarkable!" exclaimed Abney, in compliment to Bart's wonderful powers. Then he added: "I shall not rest until these rascals have received the utmost punishment the law provides."

And he worked so hard that Connelly got twenty years, Levingham got six years, and his name stricken from the Bar, and the bribed turnkey got eighteen months.

"A very simple case, Mr. Abney," said Bart, when the latter was bidding him good-night. "I hope some time you will need my services in something more difficult."

"I have a most perplexing case in hand now, that has baffled all detective skill. I wish you would call at my chambers to-morrow, and I will give you the particulars."

Which Bart promised to do, and the adventures that grew out of the affair may be told later on.

HAVE

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By HEADON HILL.

Author of "The Peril of the Prince," "Seaward for the Foe," "Guilty Gold," etc.

CHAPTER XII. (*continued*).

Two minutes later, when he bustled into the private room with the stewed pigeons, there was not a more obliging waiter in the metropolis than Carlo's substitute. There were again indications of an abrupt change of subject, and it took the form of a request by Mr. Hoathley to have his flask filled with brandy—at the bar. Luigi was in such a hurry to obey the order that he omitted to quite close the door behind him, though it certainly sounded as if it were shut to. So it was that in returning with the replenished flask another particle of talk reached him on the stairs. It was Tasker, who said:

"What about conveying the stuff afterwards? It will be a good load."

And the other replied: "That is all arranged. I have engaged a——"

But here he broke off as the waiter entered, and made a remark on the fineness of the evening, to which Tasker assented with great cordiality. Mr. Hoathley, who was eating his dinner with gusto, kept one eye on his plate and the other on the flask as Luigi brought it to him. If he had possessed a third wherewith to scan the waiter's face he would have noticed sooner that the latter's gaze was concentrated on two or three dark smears on the white damask of the table-cloth, on the left side of his plate.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the waiter, in his fawning broken English, "I mooch 'fraid you cut your hand. See, table-cloth quite bloody."

The elder diner examined his wrist with an exclamation of annoyance, and cocked his nearest eye knowingly at Tasker.

"Quite right, waiter," he said; "I cut my wrist a week ago, and it doesn't heal as quickly as I thought—as it ought, I should say. The sticking-plaster has come off and caused this unpleasantness on your snowy linen. Ah, thanks—thank you very much. You are really an estimable fellow."

For the waiter had produced from his pocket a case of court-plaster, a bit of which he applied deftly and gently to the cut, thus obtaining a nearer inspection of the injury—a shallow cut about half-an-inch long, that might have been done with a pen-knife. It was in reality a mere scratch, and would have been healed before in a thoroughly healthy patient.

By nine o'clock the public room was nearly emptied of diners, most of whom had either left altogether or were congregated at the bar, holding a high parliament on the day's racing or the latest new burlesque. The waiter, therefore, had more time to devote to the *tête-à-tête* party upstairs, and he gave no ground of complaint on the score of inattention. At about half-past nine he received an order to bring the bill, together with coffee and cigars, to obtain which he had to apply to Tamponi in the bar.

The signor, who was deep in conversation with a couple of sporting men and a music-hall artist, told him to go and turn down the gas in the now-deserted public room, and come back for the bill and the coffee. The moment his back was turned, one of the sporting men—a fashionably-dressed, coarse-featured individual, known as "Big Harry"—leant over the counter, and addressed a few whispered words to Tamponi, who started, and looked after the retreating waiter. "Big Harry" repeated his confidential communication to the other sporting man and to the artist, with the result that while the four heads were put together in hushed excitement there was a momentary cessation in the hilarious chatter which had preceded Luigi's appearance. It lasted but a second or two. When the waiter came back, the conversation had been restored to its original channel, only it was carried on, perhaps, in a slightly higher pitch.

"Here you are," said Tamponi; "here is the tray. Stay, though," he added, as if it was an afterthought, "I will take it up myself." And, suiting the action to the word he took the tray and disappeared with it up the stairs. He was back in less than a minute and resumed his interrupted talk, but an eloquent flash passed from Tamponi's bright Italian eyes to those of his customer's, which a keen observer might have attributed to something of deeper interest than the successful bet of "Big Harry's" that was under discussion.

Meanwhile the waiter, while being temporarily relieved of his duty by the proprietor, had wandered off to the backroom, where he proceeded to employ himself after the manner of his kind in flicking the empty tables with his napkin. Five minutes passed, and then he was recalled to more serious work by the ringing of the bell from the private room. Luigi's was one of those faces which did not readily express astonishment, but a look of surprise certainly wrinkled his brow when, on ascending the stairs, he was met by the tinkling of the cracked piano and the quavering tones of the elder guest rising and falling in an inharmonious attempt to render "Annie Rooney."

"They have had a fair amount of liquor," he said to himself, "but surely not enough to throw them off the line."

On entering the room he found Tasker seated at the piano, while Mr. Hoathley, with his necktie unfastened and his legs outstretched under the table, was leaning back in his chair choking out the words of the popular ditty.

EVER

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"The Cat's Paw"

is the title of a charming new Serial Story which starts in

NEXT SATURDAY

6d.

THE LADY'S MAGAZINE FOR JUNE.

"Dear old boy! Good old waiter!" hiccoughed Tasker, turning round on the stool. "Getsh some candles for piano, there's a good old chappy. My frensh old—beastly old. Can't see words without music, can't see music without light. You know wharra mean. Getsh some piano candles, there's a good old Macaroni."

Luigi moved towards the door, but on his way, Mr. Hoathley caught him by the lapel of his coat and whispered vinously, in his most paternal manner:

"You must 'scuse the young gentleman's rudeness, waiter; he's a little festive, you see. That grand old port of yours is so 'zileratin'. Besht to humour them when they get like that, isn't it?"

"A new development this," thought the waiter, as he went rather slowly down the stairs in quest of the candles. "What does it mean, I wonder? It's close on ten now; if they are really going to make a night of it the job has been postponed, I suppose."

When he returned there was a change in the position of the convivial pair. Tasker was still seated at the piano, thumping vigorously in the niche by the fireplace, but his guest had left the table and was leaning against the mantelpiece, to which he had transported his glass and bottle of wine. Croning out snatches from a piece of music selected from a tattered pile on the piano, he was apparently waiting for the candles before commencing in earnest.

"Ah, here is our friend with the lights," he exclaimed, regarding Carlo's substitute with a satyr-like leer of repletion. "Stick them in, please, waiter, and then go and fetch another bottle of port. This one is a dead man, I think."

As he spoke he took the bottle from the mantelpiece, and holding it up, looking critically at it, as though to see if it were really empty. At the same moment the waiter passed between him and the piano and began to fit the candles into the sconces on the instrument. Hoathley's attitude changed as if by magic.

The drunken smirk was replaced with a tigerish glare, as with the quickness of a juggler, he shifted his grasp from the body to the neck of the bottle, and whirled it high in the air, to come crashing down with a sickening thud on the stooping waiter's skull.

The man toppled right across the piano, jangling the notes discordantly, and, nearly knocking Tasker off the stool, rolled limply to the floor, where he lay like a log, face upwards.

"So much for Mr. Detective Zambra," said Hoathley, bending over the prostrate form. "I should like to knife the brute, but it might complicate matters. However, I think I've taken the wind out of his sails for quite long enough to give us a free hand. Get your hat and coat, Tasker. A quick cab will take us to Paddington just in time for the 10.30. Once in it we get a long start, for the telegraph offices have long been closed, and there is no later train to Reading to-night."

In another minute the room was deserted, save by the silent figure lying motionless by the piano.

CHAPTER XIII.

A Night of Terror.

After Zambra's departure Marion began to feel the loneliness of her position in a more marked degree. So far she had been buoyed up by the excitement of consulting the detective, and of herself to some small extent assisting his investigation. But now that the case had been lifted clean out of the region of her capabilities, and she was left with nothing to do but watch and wait, her nerves yielded a little to the pressure. Suffering from this reaction, she found the ensuing evening and night in the silent house more of an ordeal than she had expected, and she gladly welcomed the morning which would at least bring her companionship in the man whom Zambra was to send to dismantle the strong room.

He came about ten o'clock—a stalwart, quiet ex-policeman, who had learnt the use of pick and trowel in earlier days as a pioneer-sergeant in the Guards, and was now a valued member of Zambra's staff. The detective had the faculty of laying his hand on the right man for particular services, the consequence being that he was the centre of a little band of followers, each as nearly as possible perfect in his own line, and one of which was pretty certain to be able to cope with any emergency that might arise.

Neil Fergusson set to work without waste of time, and the brickwork quickly began to crumble before the attack of his crowbar and pickaxe. Marion was in and out of the cellar all the morning, more for the sake of company than impelled by an overwhelming wish that the money should be found; for from the first she had recognised that such a discovery would, after all, be but a secondary matter which could not of itself establish Cuthbert's innocence. But as the work of demolition proceeded, and bit by bit the heavy masses of brickwork came clattering down in a smother of dust, her anxiety grew apace, and she could not repress her disappointment at the futility of Fergusson's efforts.

For when at length the brawny Scotchman emerged from the *débris* and flung his crowbar aside, the strong room stood revealed as just what it professed to be—a solidly-built chamber, and nothing more. The floor had been cemented on to the original flags of the cellar, just as the sides had been built on to the foundation walls of the house, with not so much as space for a mouse to run between. No secret hiding-place was unearthed; no buried hoard came to light. Zambra was at fault. What if he should also miss the mark in the more important branch of the inquiry?

Marion let fall some doubts of the kind, and was gravely rebuked by Fergusson, whose faith in his chief was invincible.

"Dinna ye fash yourself aboot that, miss," he said. "Mortal man can't tell what's working in the governor's brain. It's like as not he knew it all along."

But Marion shook her head, and after Zambra's henchman had gathered up his tools and left for town to report at the office her spirits sank lower still. And later on in the afternoon her depression was increased by the receipt of a note from Mr. Oakley telling her that Cuthbert Blakesly had been brought up on the remand that morning, and after a lengthy hearing had been committed for trial at the Assizes.

As at the inquest, the evidence of the Public Analyst that

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the spot of blood on the bicycle was human blood, had carried conviction that the whole of the story put forward for the defence was a fabrication. The kindly manager bade her keep heart, and enumerated the efforts that were being made in her lover's behalf, but he closed his letter with one crushing fact that made his comfort seem but cold indeed. The Assizes would commence in ten days. But ten days remained to achieve the only real defence that could save Cuthbert's life—the tracking of those stealthy footsteps that must have crept guiltily from Kennett's Cross that fatal night.

Marion's fears were further aggravated by Zambra's silence. He had promised to communicate with her the moment he had any definite information, but he had made no sign since his departure the previous day. Fergusson had told her that he had received final instructions from his chief early that morning, and that Zambra had intimated that he would be engaged on the Kennett's Cross case all day, but he had not taken his subordinate into further confidence. All that the Scotchman knew, or was inclined to say, was that he had been ordered to report at the office on his return to town. In her impatience Marion forgot that barely twenty-four hours had elapsed since Zambra started on what her father would have called a "blind trail," and so came to the conclusion that he had been as unsuccessful in tracing out the inner meaning of the Worcester Park postmark as he had been in the matter of the strong room.

When night came down again, enshrouding the gloomy house in darkness, Marion had worked herself into such a pitch of nervous excitement that sleep seemed out of the question. The fact was—though she would never have confessed it—that the solitude and ghastly associations of the place were telling upon the girl's mind, and the uneasiness which she herself attributed to anxiety on Cuthbert's account, was in truth partly due to the horror of her own situation. She would have given the world for someone to talk to. Every groan and creak of the worm-eaten rafters began to have a new significance for her, and in the black recesses of the deserted rooms there seemed to lurk unspeakable possibilities of the Unseen.

It was not till nearly midnight that Marion extinguished the lamp in the sitting-room and went upstairs to bed. But once in the bedroom she could not bring herself to undress, so flung herself down, just as she was, to toss about and wonder over and over again what Zambra was doing, and whether the morrow would bring her news from him. She had lain thus for over an hour when she was reminded sharply that she had not made preparations for a night of wakefulness. Her candle guttered down in the socket, and, casting weird shadows on the ceiling with its expiring flickers finally went out, leaving her in total darkness. Marion turned over on the pillow and spent another half-hour in trying to compose herself to sleep, but in vain, and then suddenly her heart stood still for she knew that a great peril was upon her.

Very slowly, very gently, but with a faint scrooping sound of the rusty mechanism that she could not mistake, the handle of her bedroom door was turned. There followed a pause of some ten seconds—it seemed ten years to Marion lying there—and then there was a slight push, which told her that the door had been tried, only to meet with a prompt check from the strong iron bolt of her father's fitting, which she had luckily shot home on retiring. In the face of an imminent danger Marion's high courage steadied her nerves in an instant. She slipped noiselessly from the bed, and, stealing across the room to the door, strained her ears to catch the slightest sound. Soft and regular, there rose and fell on the other side a gentle wheezing, so restrained as to be almost inaudible, but sufficiently distinct to a close listener to leave no doubt of its origin. It was the breathing of the person who had tried the door.

Marion clasped her hands to still her heart's wild beating. Fear had left her, but her whole being was thrilled with the conviction that by that thin partition alone was she

DANGERS OF OBESITY.

EXTRAORDINARILY SUCCESSFUL TREATMENT.

A great authority on corpulency, its causes and its cure, calls attention to certain vital facts which all of us who are inclined to undue stoutness would do well to ponder over with the utmost seriousness. Obesity is not merely an unwelcome and uncomely physical development; it is a grave menace to health. An accumulation of fat may occur upon the muscles of the heart or around the kidneys, and persons in this condition are extremely liable to have these vital organs impaired, whereby disaster is invited. Mr. F. Cecil Russell, the well-known specialist, from whose book, "Corpulency and the Cure," we glean our facts, says: "Those who suffer from *polysarcia omenti*, that is an accumulation of abdominal subcutaneous fat, sometimes several inches in depth, carry also an enormous weight of fat around the internal organs, and are prone to the complaints known as fatty degeneration of the heart and liver." How may this state of things be remedied? Mr. Russell shows us the way. By the author's treatment we may positively lose two stone in about a month, with the greatest possible benefit in health and strength, muscle and brain. Paradoxical as it may seem, the process of reduction is accompanied by increase of appetite and greater digestive activity, so that whilst more food is required and vigour and vitality are thereby increased, the body grows less and less in weight to the extent of from ½lb. to 2lb. a day, as the test of the weighing machine will demonstrate. The treatment is absolutely harmless, and involves no discomfort or inconvenience, no irritating restrictions, no weakening cathartics. It is an unquestioned and unquestionable success, and the author, who has devoted years of study to the subject, guarantees a noticeable reduction within 24 hours of commencing the treatment, which aims at the very root of obesity, so that the superfluous fat does not return when the treatment is discontinued. To judge from the records of nearly a thousand cases in which the patients themselves have testified in writing to the marvellous effects of the regimen, Mr. Russell is to be heartily congratulated upon the practical results of his study and research. We advise our readers to call the attention of stout friends to this, because, sincerely, we think they ought to know. For their information we may say, that on sending 2d. in stamps the book, "Corpulency and the Cure" (256 pages), containing a reprint of Press notices from some hundreds of medical and other journals—British and foreign—and other interesting particulars, including the "recipe," can be had (post free) from Mr. F. C. Russell, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C.

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separated from the key to the mystery of Kennett's Cross. Zambra must have been right in his surmise that her father's murderer had gone empty away on the night of the crime. But something over and above the detective's anticipations had happened. The terrible Unknown, seeing by the published reports that the strong-room had been devoid of plunder, must have come to the same conclusion as Zambra—that Michael Standridge had hedged in his hoard by some deeper scheme. Knowing that his coming would now be unlooked for, and that the house was only occupied by a helpless girl, he must have returned with dreadful persistence to unearth the hidden gold at all hazards.

The breathing continued for nearly a minute, and then the sound on the other side of the door somewhat altered in character. It became a gentle sibilation, lasting a considerable time, but intermittent and irregular. Marion, with her ear glued to the panel, recognised the importance of the change at once. She had two foes to contend with and the slight hissing noise was a whispered conference as to their next plan of attack.

Suddenly the whispering ceased, and the silence was followed by a distant creak, which Marion knew from the experience of the last few days proceeded from a loose board at the far end of the western passage. The lurkers had retired from the door, and were going the rounds of the empty bed-rooms. Her resolution was taken on the instant. She would slip out of the house while the intruders were still upstairs, and run to Wilmington, where she could procure help to capture those whom she suspected to be guilty of worse than robbery. Cautiously withdrawing the bolt, she stepped out on to the landing, half-expectant that hands might be laid on her. But no; all around was in pitch darkness. But at the end of the passage she caught a faint gleam of light, as from a closed bulls-eye lantern, which showed that those she had to dread were engaged elsewhere.

Quickly and silently closing the bedroom door behind her, she began to descend the stairs, when again the warning creak in the passage told her that the midnight prowlers were returning.

It was too late to think of going back to the bedroom, and it was still possible that she might reach the front door undiscovered.

With great presence of mind she continued her way in that direction. Her chief hope was that the persons, whoever they might be, would not again try her bedroom door, and finding her gone take measures to prevent her escape before she had time to unfasten the elaborate series of bolts and chains with which Michael had fortified the front door.

She had no idea how the entry had been effected, but she knew that it could not have been by that way, as she had bolted and chained the door before going up to bed.

One other chance there was—that her assailants might have themselves unfastened the front door in order to facilitate their own escape in the event of being disturbed.

Both these chances were denied to her. She traversed the dark hall and reached the front door, to find it just as she had left it. At the same moment, just as she was commencing to pull the first of the heavy bolts, there fell upon her ears from the direction of the top of the stairs a sound that sickened her more than ruffian shouts or pistol shots could have done. It was the pad, pad, pad of shoeless footfalls, and it meant that she was too late. The marauders had passed her bedroom without trying it a second time, and so quick had been their progress that the omission, instead of aiding her escape, bade fair to prevent it. They were making straight for the hall. They would descend the stairs and be upon her before she could undo half the cumbrous fastenings. To attempt to remove the chains would mean certain discovery; they jangled at the slightest touch.

With not a second left for deliberation, Marion acted on an instinct of immediate self-preservation, and glided noiselessly into the left-hand unfurnished sitting-room, the door of which was luckily open. In a moment she was glad that she had made this choice in preference to the used room on the other side of the hall, for standing behind the door, she was able to make out that her own parlour was the destination of those who came from above. Thither the stealthy footfalls were directed, and as they suddenly ceased a smell of hot japanned metal and burning oil reached Marion's hiding-place. At the same moment she heard a whisper:

"Better open this infernal thing, hadn't we? It stinks fit to choke one, and the light can't reach her from down here. Besides, she's asleep, isn't she?"

Marion started as a second whisper made reply in a style that seemed strangely familiar.

"My researches at the entrance of the maiden's bower led me to believe that she slumbers," said the voice. "There is something very touching, my Swinley, in the slumber of a maiden, especially when, as I strongly opine in this case, it happens to be her last slumber. Open the lantern by all means, but take care that the light doesn't fall on the blind. It is well to be cautious, though I dare swear there is none within a mile."

As he finished, a dull light sprang up in the opposite room, and Marion, peering through the door crack, saw a sight which lifted the scales from her eyes and filled her soul with a loathing horror, not only of the object of her gaze, but of the trusting weakness with which she had yielded herself to deception.

Standing by the table in the opposite room, his fixed eye burning luridly in the subdued light of the dark-lantern, was the person who had gained her confidence as "Uncle Simon." With him was a tall young man, not wholly ill-looking, but of sinister expression, whom she did not remember to have seen before.

The latter seemed to be somewhat averse to the awful crime foreshadowed in the villainous suggestion of his companion.

"You are still bent on the extreme course, then?" he said. "As I have told you all along, I don't see the necessity for it, and you mustn't expect me to help you in anything of the kind."

"My young friend, Tasker," replied Hoathley, "when I was down here the other day for the double purpose of having a further look round and of recovering the envelope, I saw enough of the young lady to know that she is likely to be dangerous. The mere fact of her setting Zambra on the trail should convince you of that."

"A lot of good it's done her," muttered Tasker.

"More by luck than judgment, we have laid him by the heels for to-night," continued Hoathley, driving Marion's last hope away, "but I cannot afford to allow this unscrupulous young person to make use of him or similar instruments in future. Besides, you have never properly taken in that I am in reality a kind of relative of the late lamented Michael. If you had, you would see that in any case there is another reason why this girl should be extinguished. We have not got the treasure yet. Supposing we do not find it at all in the limited time at our disposal? Well, in that case, it will probably be hit upon by accident in the future—this old place will be pulled down, or something of the sort—in which event, Miss Marion out of the way, I can bob up serenely, as though from a prolonged absence abroad, and claim, as her next-of-kin, the money of which my amiable half-brother was so anxious to deprive me."

"That's all very well," returned Tasker, sullenly, "but if by chance the game miscarries to-night, and the haul is deferred in the way you mention, where do I come in? When I consented to put you up to Standridge's whereabouts you told me I was to have half the stuff down on the nail for my assistance. How do I know that you will shell out if the money comes to you lawfully at some future period as heir at law?"

(*To be continued.*)

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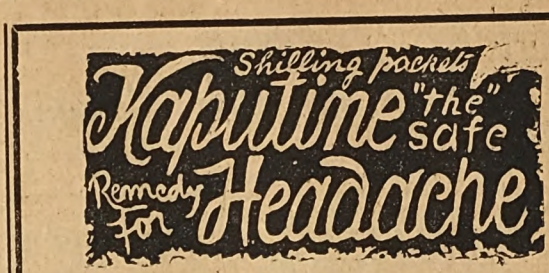

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Short Stories That . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, June 10th. Post-cards only, please. The prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. A. M. Miller, 29 Mile End Avenue, Aberdeen, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

PA: "What's baby crying for, Dolly?" Dolly: "Just 'cos I showed her how to eat her cake."

"DOBBS made a lot of money this season." "How?" "He got out road maps for all the floors in our big department stores."

GRAHAM: "I say, old man, why did the barmaid ale?" Thomson (after pondering awhile): "Give it up." Graham: "Because the stout porter bitter."

BARBER (insinuatingly): "Your hair is a trifle thin, sir." Victim (grimly): "So is your chance of selling me a bottle of your hair restorer."

ALGERNON (making a call): "What are these noises I hear, Miss Maud?" Miss Maud (whose mother is vindictively making a wholly unnecessary noise in washing the dishes): "It's dear mamma. She dearly loves to sort over the *bric-à-brac*."

MR. ANDJERRY: "I don't know what to do with our Tommy. He's only ten, and incorrigible. Do you know anything that will break a haughty spirit?" Mr. Hites (sadly): "Yes. Make him wheel the baby in a perambulator as the other boys are coming out of school."

A STUDENT in one of our universities had just started for a stroll down the street when he remembered that his fire was very low when he left his room. Not wishing to return to a fireless room, he hurried back, and soon made up a good fire. Setting out again, he noticed some of the people turning round to look at him, and laughing. Presently a party of boys who came along shouted out: "Just look at his cane!" On looking down, what was his horror to discover that he had been carrying the poker instead of his walking-stick!

*THE manager of a music-hall in the North, who, although a most illiterate man, prided himself not a little on his oratorical powers, made it a practice every Saturday night to announce the leading items of the following week's bill of fare. One evening he finished his weekly speech in the following remarkable terms: "Last but not least, ladies and gentlemen, allow me to inform you that at an enormous expense I have exclusively engaged the marvellous Bormdee Brothers, the world-famed acrobats, to appear here in their celebrated entertainment for six nights, commencing Monday next. Understand, ladies and gentlemen, the Bormdee Brothers, the champion acrobats of the world." Here he paused for a moment to regain his breath, and then with an impressive wave of his forefinger, proudly continued: "Yes; and what's more, on Monday week we've got a troupe coming what can knock 'em into a cocked hat!"

"ALL that I want," said Mr. O'Tool, "is peace. And by jabers I'll have that if I have to fight every man and woman in the parish."

MRS. SLIMDIET (to new boarder): "This is pound-cake, Mr. Starver." New Boarder (carefully lifting a piece): "What did you pound it with?"

MISTRESS: "Bridget, I hope you don't light the fires with paraffin oil?" Cook: "Never a bit, mum! Oi wets it down wid paraffin oil an lights it wid a match."

"THIS is my son Frederick, Mr. Fosdick," said Mr. Glanders proudly, introducing his five-year-old boy to his caller. "Well, Frederick," said the caller, "do you obey your mamma?" "Yes, sir," replied Frederick promptly, "and so does papa."

TEACHER: "Jimmy, if you found eighteen pennies and another boy should take two-thirds of them away, what would each of you have?" Jimmy: "I'd have six pennies, an' he'd have a good thumpin' 'less he'd handed back the rest of 'em mighty quick."

CUSTOMER: "And is this chair really an antique piece of furniture?" Dealer: "Antique, madam! There's no doubt about that. Why, it was so worm-eaten when I bought it that I had to have a new back, and a new seat, and three new legs made for it."

IT is always better for a boy not to smoke, but it is not often that the small smoker runs himself into difficulties so easily as one who was recently lounging about a railway-station. Presently he went up to the booking-office, and asked for a "half return" to a town a little distance up the line. "What! a small chap like you a-smoking?" said the clerk noticing the cigarette. "Who are you calling a small chap? I'm fourteen!" replied the boy indignantly. "Very well; full fare, then, please," was the clerk's only answer.

A FEW weeks ago the Glasgow Police Court was "set in a roar" by one of those "flashes of merriment" which occasionally relieve a depressing environment. The police had made a raid on an alleged betting establishment, and one of the delinquents was being examined by the presiding magistrate. Bailie: "What are you by trade?" Prisoner: "I'm a locksmith, your honour." Bailie: "Oh, you're a locksmith, are you? And what might you be doing when the officers arrested you?" Prisoner: "Making a bolt for the door, your honour."

THE ONE ALTERNATIVE.—"Mary," he said in desperation, "I shall wait no longer. Either you must consent to become my wife or end this farce. Your repeated delays are killing me." "Very well, Hubert," she answered calmly, "if you take that ground, there is but one alternative for me." She drew off the diamond ring which sparkled on her finger and handed it to him. He took it sadly and bitterly exclaimed: "Oh, false, cruel girl, to thus carelessly trample upon a heart whose every throb is for you alone! For this bauble I have no further use. Let it perish, as I hope may also the love of which it was the emblem." His hand was raised to throw the ring into the fire, but she grasped it quickly. "I merely wished to say, Hubert, that I would like you to have the wedding ring made just a trifle smaller than this."

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MR. GEO. R. SIMS'

Hair Renewer.

(Called by him "Tatcho" the Romany word for "genuine," "good," "true").

"DAILY MAIL" INTERVIEWS MR. GEO. R. SIMS.

A *Daily Mail* representative sought out Mr. Sims at Clarence Terrace, Regent's Park.

"When I discovered the preparation, I found that I had hit upon a remedy capable of working wonders," said Mr. Geo. R. Sims. "Look at my hair now. In time people got to know that I had discovered a renewer that had worked wonders in my own case. Then the trouble began.

"Letters in thousands poured in to me from men and women in every quarter of the world. The work of answering the letters was enormous, and it became quite evident that at the rate at which the demand was increasing I should very soon need a large staff of clerks to attend solely to the hair-renewer department of correspondence.

"In consequence, I said to myself, Why should this thing go on? If the public wants my hair restorer, the public shall have it; but the demand must be met in the ordinary business-like way. So I resolved to place the genuine article within reach of all."

To undertake the introduction of "Tatcho" to the public a wealthy syndicate has been formed, embracing several of the best-known scientific, literary and commercial names in London, and under the name of Geo. R. Sims Company is in a position to introduce "Tatcho" to the toilet-table of every member of the King's vast Empire.

Geo. R. Sims Company have therefore decided to distribute a quantity of large trial bottles of "Tatcho" to enable those who have not yet profited by Mr. Sims' discovery to do so. The Company does this in the belief that such distribution will enable the preparation to become more widely known, and will introduce it into every home in a more satisfactory manner than could be effected through unlimited puffing by advertisement. To enable you to participate in this distribution, cut out the coupon under Mr. Geo. R. Sims' portrait, and post to the Company's offices, with your name and address legibly written, accompanied by postal order for 1/10, in exchange for which you will receive, under plain cover, a large 4/6 trial bottle, post free.

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

Last week I endeavoured, by every means in my power, to draw your attention to the "G. D." I am now going to tell you what the mystic letters stand for. They are the initials of the best, the most intensely interesting, the most powerful, dramatic serial story ever penned. They stand for

"The Golden Dwarf."

Now, don't throw this paper down in disgust, and murmur, "Thought as much." You didn't, couldn't, and wouldn't "think as much" as this story involves. Doubtless you have before to-day been induced to read serial stories by means of insidious advertisements. But you have never in your whole life read such a wonderful story as "The Golden Dwarf." Its plot embodies the most fascinating mystery ever conceived by novelist's brain. Unravel it during the run of the first three or four instalments, and you will prove yourself worthy of the highest place in the Criminal Investigation Department.

"The Golden Dwarf" is a romance of the present day, and is written by Mr. R. Norman Silver. Those who read his "Keeper of Secrets" series will be glad to renew acquaintance with the creator of Mr. Hugo Pontifex,

"The Golden Dwarf" starts in *Short Stories* in the number to be published on June 25th. You will do well to order it of your newsagent beforehand. The demand is going to be phenomenal.

❦❦❦

If some good fairy godmother could tell the women of to-day that they might each choose one constituent of beauty, in addition to what they already possess, I believe a large majority would ask for the gift of a good figure with a slender waist. But, alas and alack! there are no fairies to be heard, save those of science, and they tell us that the corsets with which we have been wont to try to keep our figures trim are injurious to health, and that if we would be really beautiful in the matter of figure, we must actually get rid of all superfluous fat, and not try to squeeze it out of sight. How is it to be done? The clear answer is to be found in a little book written by Mr. F. Cecil Russell, of Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, who has been scientifically studying the question for many years, making many experiments, and who can now show a record of thousands of cures that he has effected by his wonderful treatment of obesity. Let me advise all who desire to get and to retain a graceful figure, to send the above author two penny stamps to cover the postage of his book, "Corpulency and the Cure," which he will then give to anyone who asks for it.

❦❦❦

You tell me, "A. M. H.," that you are deeply in love with a young Irishman who seems very fond of you, though he has never told you so. You have known him for more than a year, and have been out with him on several occasions, but, although he has been very kind to you, he has never asked you to meet him again, nor remarked on what you wear, neither has he ever given you a present. He is twenty-one, and you think it time he thought of a young girl, and you know for a fact that he is not going out with anyone else. There is a young girl who has just come up from the country that he is friendly with, but she does not care for him. You want to know if he is to be your husband, as you have taken to him such a lot more than you have to anyone else. Well, "A. M. H.," I really do not see how I can tell any more than you can. I do not think, from what you tell me, that you ought to consider he cares for you any more than he does for anyone else, and you can only wait, and time will show whether he is to be anything more than a friend to you. I am glad you like *Short Stories*.

❦❦❦

"Jeni."—Etiquette varies in different countries. Thus: In Holland a lady is expected to retire precipitately if she should enter a shop or restaurant where men are congregated. She waits until they have transacted their business and departed.

Ladies seldom rise in Spain to receive a male visitor, and they rarely accompany him to the door. For a Spaniard to give a lady—even his wife—his arm while out walking is looked upon as a violation of propriety.

No Turk will ever enter a sitting-room with dirty shoes. The upper classes wear tight-fitting shoes with goloshes over them. The latter, which receive all the dirt and dust, are left outside the door. The Turk never washes in dirty water. Water is poured over his hands, so that when polluted it runs away.

In Syria the people never take off their hats or turbans when entering the house or visiting a friend, but they always leave their shoes at the door. There are no mats or scrapers outside, and the floors inside are covered with expensive rugs kept very clean, and in Moslem houses used to kneel upon while praying.

In Persia, among the aristocracy, a visitor sends notice an hour or two before calling, and gives a day's notice if the visit is one of great importance. He is met by servants before he reaches the house, and other considerations are shown him, according to relative rank. The left, and not the right, is considered the position of honour.

In Sweden, if you address the poorest person on the street you must lift your hat. To enter a reading-room or a bank with one's hat on is regarded as impolite.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 4,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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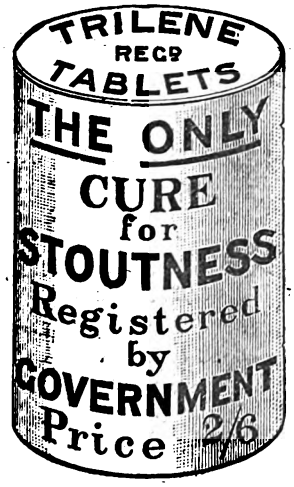

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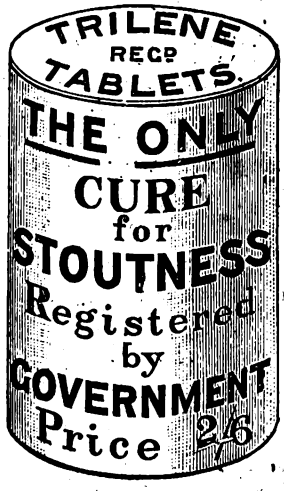

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely. You have our united thanks, and if I can do anything to promote your interests I will freely use my utmost endeavours to do so.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

Mrs. DARNLEY SMITH, Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, writes: "Trilene Tablets have reduced my weight very much. I am so much lighter in every way, and better in health."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

"77 Hindhill Street, Heywood, February 5th, 1898.

"Gentlemen,—I have not quite finished the box of Tablets and am 21lb. lighter. The change is great, and several friends are beginning the treatment, which not only reduces fat but strengthens rheumatic joints—such has been the case with me.

"Yours sincerely, M. A. HEYWOOD."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mr. WALKER, 236 London Road, Hazelgrove, Stockport, says: "I have used one box and am 14lb. lighter. Send another soon as possible."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. E. ALEXANDER, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They have reduced me quite 2 stone, and I am now quite cured."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 3lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

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Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Mrs. TAYLOR-ROBINSON, of Tweed Green House, Whalley Range, Manchester, says: "I feel so much lighter and better since taking your Tablets, and am so much thinner that I hardly recognise myself."

Miss A. LONG, of 9 South Parade, Waterford, writes: "Your Tablets have reduced me 14lb."

Miss A. DAWSON, 62 Orchard Street, Weston-super-Mare, says: "Glad to say the Tablets have sufficiently reduced me. I shall always recommend them."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

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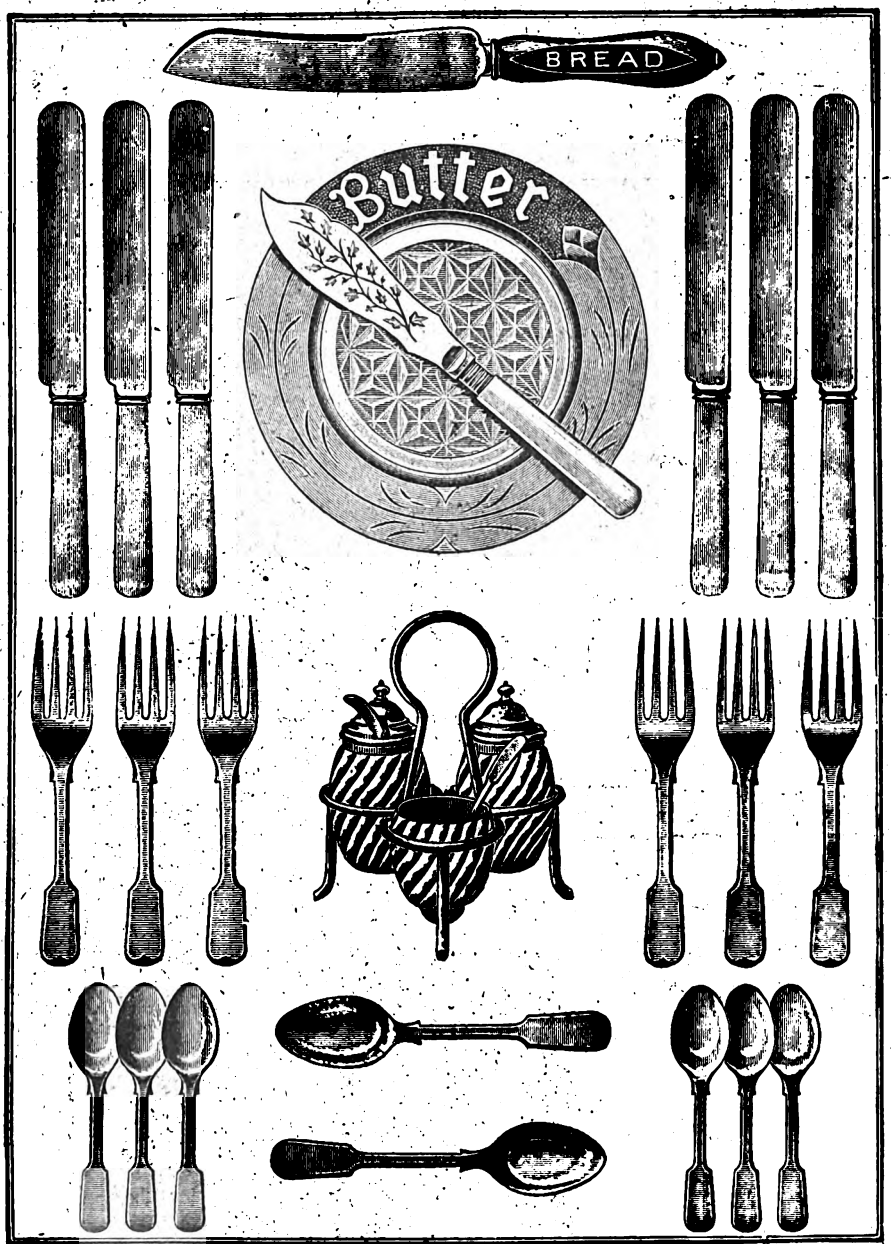

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SHORT STORIES

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Setting his back against the door, he faced the thief, and confronted Innocenza, her hands full of jewels, and the safe beside her broken open.

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A DUCHESS'S DAUGHTER.

A ROMANCE OF HIGH LIFE AND LOW LIFE, OF HONOUR AND DISHONOUR, OF TRUST AND DISTRUST.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNINVITED GUEST.

LONDON lay shrouded beneath a pall; snow had been falling all day. It lay in corners and under porticoes, where it had drifted and impeded the progress of rich and great, poor and unknown.

A carriage drew up before a house in Grosvenor Square, and the footman sprang off to run up the steps and ring the bell. The window was let down, and a voice within the carriage exclaimed, "The snow should have been swept from the steps, Williams; we can't get out with them in that state. Let it be done."

"Yes, your grace!" he returned.

The doors were flung wide, letting out a flood of light, and revealing a spacious hall with a row of expectant servants. The message was delivered, and the steps and pavement were speedily being swept under Williams' direction.

Keen eyes watched from the carriage, for when the sweepers paused in a group at one corner of the portico and whispered together, the same voice as before demanded, "What is the matter, Williams; why don't they finish?"

The footman approached and said, "What we thought was a heap of snow, your grace, is a girl who seems to have fainted."

"A girl? Poor thing!" said a new voice, fresh, clear, and sweet.

"Carry her indoors," commanded the Duchess, "and get the carpet as quick as you can, for we are frozen ourselves!"

The footman obeyed, with no surprise, for the Duchess of Babbacombe was a philanthropist, and had homes of industry and rest in town and country for her poorer neighbours. On several occasions beggars and tramps had been entertained in Grosvenor Square, with a fine disregard of conventionality. So a stalwart footman lifted what looked like a heap of clothes, and carried it within as if it were a usual occurrence. Soon the occupants of the carriage were also engulfed in the warmth and light, and the square was left to the snow and the north wind.

The Duchess was a handsome woman, who clung to the banded hair looped up over her ears which had been fashionable in her youth; but this severe style suited her, as did the head-band of diamond stars on black velvet which she wore on her head. She looked every inch an aristocrat of the old school as she bent over the couch where they had laid her uninvited guest, and where she was presently joined by her daughter, the Lady Muriel Delany.

The latter was a girl whose face had become familiar to the public in Society papers and photographers' windows as a recognised type of beauty; but no photograph could convey the exquisite colouring which was her greatest charm.

The velvety brown eyes contrasted so beautifully with the spun-gold hair and ivory skin, relieved by a delicate rose flush and scarlet lips.

Together they bent over the girl while a maid chafed the frozen hands and another forced brandy between the blue lips.

The object of their solicitude was as striking in her way as her noble hostesses. It was difficult to say whether she was beautiful or not, but from a painter's point of view the opaque dead whiteness of her skin was more artistic than Muriel's transparent complexion and suited well the peculiar ruddy gold hair. Her features were regular without being classical, and her serge dress was clean and neat. She had no hat or cloak, but she did not look poor; there was, indeed, a noticeable air of distinction about her.

"I wonder who she is?" murmured Muriel.

"Not a daughter of the people!" replied the Duchess. "Look at those shapely hands!"

Muriel bent to examine them, and saw that one was clenched. Stooping, she loosed the clinging fingers and gave a little cry, half of astonishment and half of fear, for the object the unconscious girl had grasped through all was a tiny ivory skull exquisitely carved and modelled and perfect in every detail.

It rolled to the floor, where it lay grinning with eyeless sockets and toothless gums at the pale faces above it. Muriel picked it up and laid it on the girl's lap. As she did so, the girl on the couch stirred and sighed, and slowly opened her eyes. An exclamation broke from the Duchess, for they were the most wonderful eyes she had ever seen. Green as emeralds and bright as diamonds, they stared into hers with a strange, scared, *haunted* look in their depths, which gave her a sense of fear most foreign to her nature.

"Are you better?" she asked.

The girl nodded but never moved her eyes from the Duchess's face.

"How did you come to be out such a night?" inquired the elder lady. "Have you no home?"

The girl made no reply this time, but struggled slowly to a sitting position, and put her hand to her head as if in pain.

"What is your name?" was the next query, with a touch of imperiousness, for the Duchess could not understand this continued silence.

For answer the girl began to search in her pocket for something, and presently produced a note-book and pencil.

Tearing out a page, she wrote:

"I'm dumb and friendless, but ought never to have come in here. Forgive! I am thankful to you, but pray let me go!"

As the Duchess read this, the girl sprung to her feet and made for the door, but before she reached it she fell heavily through sheer weakness.

"She ought not to go!" exclaimed Muriel.

"The Golden Dwarf" begins the week after next.

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"No," replied her mother. "She must remain, and we'll see what can be done. Make a bed in the nursery," she added to the housemaid, "and let someone sleep with her, or in the same room."

Then she swept from the apartment, followed by her daughter, and in another hour the house was wrapt in darkness.

But silence had not long fallen upon it before Muriel, who was a light sleeper, was aroused from dreams of her ball-room triumphs last night by a stealthy footstep creeping past her door. There was no doubt about it, for a board cracked, and she could distinguish the sound of breathing.

Slipping out of bed she put on her dressing-gown. As she did so her clock chimed five, so she knew it was too

To her dismay the girl flung herself at her feet. Her eyes streamed with tears, and her slender frame was shaken almost to pieces by violent sobs.

early for any of the servants to be up. Fearing she knew not what she opened her door and sped down the corridor after the wanderer.

Down the staircase pursued and pursuer hurried, and Muriel could catch the sound of the door in the carved screen being opened and shut. Courageously determined to see who it was, she crept through the door and by the light of the lamp shining through the fanlight she recognised the dumb girl fumbling at the door as if to get out.

"You!" she exclaimed.

The girl turned with a moan and, sinking at Muriel's feet, hid her face in her hands. Muriel raised her and kindly but firmly led her not to the old nursery, but to her own bedroom. The girl was dressed but shivering, so Muriel placed her in an arm-chair in front of the fire, which was not yet out, and by the aid of a little judicious handling soon burnt up brightly.

No one came in search of the fugitive, so Muriel concluded that the housemaid appointed to sleep with her had not been awakened by the escape.

Muriel, as she watched the girl from another chair, saw an intense listening look come over her face, while the scared expression in her eyes deepened. Presently she rose and walked to the windows, overlooking the square. Muriel sat wondering what she wanted, and never stirred when she opened one window, and let a rush of air into the room. She stood still for a moment, then drew the skull and a box of matches from her pocket. Striking one, she applied it to the skull, which at once gave out a glowing crimson light.

Holding it in her fingers, the girl thrust her arm out as far as she could, and remained so while Muriel counted sixteen.

Then, drawing it in, she blew it out, returned it to her pocket, shut the window, and came back to her seat by the fire. She sunk into it with a sigh, and closed her eyes. Soon she seemed to fall asleep, and when the ladies' maid entered at nine she was astonished to find both girls seated opposite each other, sleeping as peacefully as children.

That morning the household was alarmed to find traces of an attempted burglary, and Muriel, remembering her strange nocturnal adventures, shuddered, but kept silence.

CHAPTER II.

LADY MURIEL felt deeply interested in the strange girl who had so unexpectedly been brought to their door, and, having ascertained that she seemed too weak and ill to be sent away, had brought her to her boudoir.

Here the stranger sat down listlessly, making, in her black serge dress, a sombre blot on the scene.

Presently Muriel produced some ivory tablets and wrote: "What is your name?"

The other passed them back, and Muriel read "Innocenza!"

"How pretty!" ejaculated her hostess. "And your other name?"

The girl shook her head with a deep flush, and Muriel, sorry she had touched on a sore point, was about to change the subject, when the door partially opened, and a masculine voice observed: "May I come in?"

"Douglas!" exclaimed Muriel with a glad smile, holding out her hand in welcome to the noble specimen of English manhood who entered the room. Everyone admitted that Douglas Seymour Leslie, Earl of Morcambe, was indeed goodly to look upon. Tall, broad shouldered, deep-chested and lissom, with fair curly hair and deep honest blue eyes, he might have stood as a model for a Viking; while the golden moustache which shaded his upper lip gave a finishing touch to a face that was handsome without being effeminate.

He and Muriel had been playmates since childhood, and at the tender ages of three and five respectively had solemnly plighted their troth! Since then they had been constantly together, and though he had never spoken of love or proposed to her in set form yet they both understood each other and all their little world looked upon them as an engaged couple.

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She greeted him now with the look which a girl gives only to the man of her choice, and he was so engrossed in her that, not till he was well in the room, did he perceive Innocenza, who had risen and was looking from one to the other, as if uncertain what to do.

"I beg your pardon," said Douglas, bowing towards the shabby figure. "I didn't know you had a visitor."

Muriel was about to explain when with an inarticulate sound Innocenza hurried past them and left the room.

"What a striking-looking girl?" exclaimed the Earl, glancing after her. "Is that a new friend, Muriel?"

"Scarcely," replied the latter with a silvery laugh. Then she related how they had found her.

"Lucky for her it was at your mother's door she fainted," was his comment.

"Do you remember ever seeing my little cousin, Geraldine Wedmoreton?" he went on, irrelevantly.

"No!" she answered, surprised at his abrupt change of subject. "If you mean the one who was stolen by gipsies when she was a baby, certainly not. Why do you ask?"

"Because it's a very curious thing," he observed, with an embarrassed laugh, "but that waif of yours reminds me of her somehow."

"But you can't remember her either!" objected Muriel. "At the time she was stolen she was the same age as I was, three, and you were only five."

"No, of course I don't remember her actually," interposed the Earl, "but aunt has a miniature of her taken just before the kidnapping, and she had the same green eyes and red hair and white skin. That's what made me notice that girl. Has she said anything to you?"

"She can't say much!" responded Muriel, drily. "She's dumb."

"Good Heavens!" replied Douglas, starting. "How awful! So you don't know her name?"

"Just before you came I asked her what it was, and she said Innocenza; but she doesn't seem to have any other," replied Muriel rather wearily and feeling strangely jealous.

Douglas was silent a minute, and then said abruptly, "Might I see her again, Muriel?"

Muriel touched the bell, and sent the servant who answered it with a message to Innocenza that she wished to see her.

Douglas stepped forward when Innocenza entered the room, but Muriel kept coldly and proudly aloof.

"Do you remember anything about your childhood?" the Earl asked gently.

At the sound of his voice she started and looked full at him with inquiry, fear and surprise struggling for the mastery of her expressive face. He repeated the questions while she stared at him, until Muriel, with an impatient movement, thrust her own ivory tablets into the girl's nerveless hands.

Innocenza looked at them as if not knowing their use, but when Douglas smilingly held out a pencil she snatched it feverishly, and wrote with frantic haste:

"Why do you ask? Best let me go and not stay to spoil your lives. An outcast such as I am is not fit to breathe the same air. My childhood was, like my youth is now, all darkness and sorrow."

Muriel stepped forward and read it over his shoulder.

"Poor thing," she murmured, softening for a moment. "She looks as if she had been ill-used. Have you no father or mother?" she inquired, turning to the girl again.

Innocenza burst into tears, and sobbed so hysterically that Muriel whispered to Douglas that they had best not question her any more.

He assented, and added: "I'd better go now, but I shall drop in again as soon as possible."

The little cloud between the lovers had lightened somewhat, but Muriel noticed with a pang of jealousy that his last look was for the weeping girl and not for her. He had scarcely gone when the Duchess appeared, majestic in her morning dress of black silk canvas.

"Has Douglas gone?" she asked, glancing round the room.

"Yes," said Muriel a little sadly in a low voice. "He would ask Innocenza questions, and it has upset her."

At this point a powdered footman appeared with a note and a basket of rare exotics for "Lady Muriel Delany," and Innocenza took the opportunity of slipping out of the room with him.

"From Sir Ronald Curteis," said Muriel with a lovely blush. "He hopes I am not too fatigued after last night, and that he will meet us to-night at Lady Betty Foster's reception."

"Ah!" said the Duchess, "he's attentive, and, though only a baronet, more eligible than most men. His estates are splendid, and during his minority his property has been so carefully nursed that he is one of the richest men in London for his age and rank. Don't allow that girl to get intimate with you. As soon as possible I'll send her to my 'Home of Rest' in Devonshire, but she seems too weak to travel."

CHAPTER III.

LADY MURIEL evidently forgot all about her mother's advice, for the next morning she sent for Innocenza. The girl came submissively, though the haunted, scared look in her eyes had deepened. Her interest in life seemed to have revived, however, for she surveyed her surroundings with keen interest and, kneeling before Muriel, felt her dress with true feminine appreciation of its beauty.

"What are you thinking of?" asked Muriel, after a spell of silence.

Innocenza rose from her knees and began to make a tour of the apartment, touching the many pretty things it contained with evident delight and absorbed in lingering admiration.

At length she came to the inlaid writing-table crowded with the dainty and useless trifles which a girl gathers naturally about her in the course of time. Among them was a charming French almanac at which Innocenza looked at first with simple appreciation of its elegance, but as her eyes fell on the date she gave a little gasp of what sounded like horror.

Snatching it up she ran with it to Muriel's side, and, pointing to the figures twenty-three on it, looked in her face with almost agonised intensity.

Muriel, not quite understanding her evident agitation, inquired kindly:

"What is the matter?"

"Is that the right date?" wrote Innocenza rapidly.

"Yes," replied Muriel, "January twenty-third. I altered it this morning myself."

"Then I must go," was the next sentence scribbled down. "don't try to stop me, or the consequences may be serious."

You will be fascinated by "The Golden Dwarf."

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Muriel stared at her a moment, and then drew her to the window. Drawing aside the silk curtains she pointed to the square which was deep in fresh fallen snow; a dense fog, too, was rapidly gathering. Even while they looked it grew so dark they could scarcely see each other's faces, and Muriel had to switch on the electric light before she could find her way back to her chair.

"That settles it," she said with a little laugh. "It's quite impossible for you to go out, and I'm sure my mother won't let you."

To her dismay the girl flung herself at her feet. Her eyes streamed with tears, her slender frame was shaken almost to pieces by the most violent sobs, and she raised her clasped hands as if in prayer. Puzzled, alarmed, and at a loss to account for her almost hysterical agitation, Muriel raised her from the floor and soothed her as well as she could.

Presently the paroxysm passed somewhat, and searching for her note-book, she wrote on it, "Indeed I speak the truth. It is imperative for me to go or harm will come to you and yours."

"Why are you in such a hurry to go to-day?" she asked, a little coldly. "Why would not to-morrow do as well?"

"Because I have an appointment for to-night!" was the written answer. "My whole life may depend on my keeping it! For the love of Heaven let me go!"

Muriel wavered. The girl appeared in such deadly earnest, and it seemed too bad to keep her back if her private affairs required her presence.

"Where do you want to go?" she asked.

Innocenza palpably hesitated, and then reluctantly wrote: "Plane Tree Walk, Hampstead."

"I never heard of the place before," said Muriel, "and, anyhow, you would never get there in this fog, so you *must* give it up till to-morrow. Shall I write or telegraph for you?"

The girl moaned and shook her head, and Muriel, a little annoyed at her persistence and the impossibility of contenting her, turned away. Innocenza began crying again, not loudly this time, but with a bitter despair and silent anguish which seemed inconsolable. The paper which she had written on fluttered unheeded to the floor, where it lay with the address uppermost.

There were all the elements of tragedy in that dainty room, as even the powdered footman felt as he flung open the door and announced: "The Earl of Morcambe!"

"Douglas!" exclaimed Muriel, hastening forward with outstretched hands and radiant smile. "I never expected you such a day as this!"

"Well, I had some difficulty in getting here," he laughed gaily as he bent chivalrously over her taper fingers, "but I came to——" and then he paused abruptly, for his eyes fell on Innocenza, who was trying in vain to stifle her sobs. Again that jealous pang shot through Muriel as she noted his look of concern.

"It's really nothing!" she whispered, in answer to his inquiring eyes. "She wanted to go to Hampstead, and, of course, she can't. I believe it will do just as well to-morrow, only she chose to make a scene."

Douglas made no reply, but, stepping forward, took the girl's nerveless hand in his, and said gently:

"Is it very important for you to go, my poor child?"

She nodded vehemently, darting an anxious glance at Muriel meanwhile, as if afraid this might displease her.

"If someone went to explain about you, would that do?" he inquired in the same kind tone.

She nodded again, but less decisively.

"Is this the address?" he went on, picking up the paper from the floor.

Again she bent her head, with a look of surprise on her face.

He dropped her hand, and rose with the masterful air Muriel knew so well.

"Then I will go and explain!" he exclaimed impulsively.

"Impossible!" cried Muriel, starting forward. "Why should you? Besides, you will never find your way there."

"I found my way here!" he retorted, and was gone before she realised it.

As his footsteps died on the stairs, Muriel turned on Innocenza.

"This is your doing!" she exclaimed, "and if evil comes of it, I'll never forget or forgive!"

She was so blinded by emotion, she did not hear the cry that broke from the girl's lips, nor saw the hands stretched towards her, but swept from the room without another word. Had she looked back, she would have seen that Innocenza had fallen forward on the floor in a dead faint.

CHAPTER IV.

DOUGLAS stood in the street. A hansom loomed out of the fog.

Seeing the Earl, the cabman raised his hand tentatively in hope of a fare, and before he realised it, the Earl was in the cab creeping cautiously towards Hampstead.

As they advanced the fog lifted, and by the time they got to the Heath, the darkness was merely that of an ordinary January afternoon. Still only half the difficulty was surmounted, for the cabman had never heard of Plane Tree Walk, and, in desperation, the Earl jumped out and dismissed him.

"I'll walk the rest!" he observed. "Don't apologise, man! You've done your best!" with that he turned away.

By dint of asking here and there he reached the road at last and found the place he wanted.

The house was dark and silent, and the bell he pulled clanged dolefully in the distance, as if echoing through many empty rooms. Presently he detected the sound of footsteps approaching within, various bolts and bars seemed to be drawn, and the ponderous door was slowly opened. A man appeared in the aperture holding a lamp above his head and dressed in a sort of livery.

"Can I see——" began Douglas; then the difficulty of explaining, and his ignorance of whom to ask for, made him pause.

"Do you bring news of Innocenza?" asked the man, in a singularly refined voice, peering at him steadily.

"Yes, that's it," cried the Earl, relieved at having his path made so unexpectedly easy for him. "Fact is ——"

The man raised his hand, respectfully, peremptorily.

"That's for other ears than mine!" he observed. "Step in."

Wonderingly, Douglas obeyed, and as he did so, noticed that the man wore as a scarf-pin a miniature ivory skull. He shuddered a little and marvelled how a

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servant in a big house was allowed to wear so gruesome an ornament.

The hall was handsome, being paved with marble of various colours and hung with magnificent tapestry, but otherwise unfurnished.

Douglas followed the man into a room furnished in old oak. Here he was left and walking to the open fire-place to warm his hands he noticed with another disagreeable thrill that the carving on the chairs formed miniature skulls, and an ivory one occupied a position on the mantel-piece.

"What queer taste," he muttered, and then, glancing round, saw he was no longer alone. A gipsy-looking man in evening dress was at his elbow, and on his shirt-front gleamed out the hideous skull, in diamonds this time. Rather taken aback, Douglas bowed, and began: "I hope you will pardon my intrusion, but——" He paused, at a loss what to call Innocenza, but the gipsy interrupted.

"She isn't coming back to-night," he observed, having evidently been told the object of the stranger's visit.

"She's unable," replied Douglas. "The fog was so thick it was impossible; but meanwhile she's in safe hands, and hopes to come to-morrow."

"To-morrow will be too late, and she knows it!" said the man fiercely. "She has done it on purpose."

"Pardon me, but may I ask what position the young lady occupies in your household?"

"She is my adopted daughter," replied the man.

"*Adopted!*" exclaimed Douglas. "How came you to adopt her?"

The gipsy looked up and said: "I don't see why you shouldn't know. I've nothing to be ashamed of. I found a baby under a rock in Scotland, and, as no one claimed it, adopted it."

Douglas' face fell. This was not the accepted version of his cousin's disappearance.

"Would you tell me the name of the place?" he asked.

"I'd like to know what these questions mean!" retorted the man.

"Willingly," answered the Earl, and gave the story.

The gipsy listened with a peculiar expression.

When Douglas had finished, he said: "The name of the place was Blairlochran, and this was round the child's neck."

He held out locket as he spoke.

It fell open as Douglas touched it, and disclosed a face at sight of which Douglas uttered an exclamation. The gipsy showed no sign of curiosity.

"This is my aunt!" said Douglas. "I'm right; but how can I prove it?"

"Best way would be to make inquiries," observed the man. "I never did, but I don't want to stand in the girl's way, and I'll surrender her to her mother if you prove the relationship."

In another hour the Earl was speeding to Blairlochran.

CHAPTER V.

BABBACOMBE HOUSE was silent and dull after the storm that had lately swept over it. The Duchess had gone out, but Lady Muriel had steadily refused to accompany her, and, on the plea of a severe headache, had shut herself into her room.

Her mother was not fully acquainted with what had taken place the previous day, and only knew that Innocenza had been found in a dead faint on the floor of her daughter's boudoir. She was not sorry to find that the latter seemed to have got over her fascination for the beggar-maid, and did not even inquire after her. Meanwhile, Innocenza felt acutely the chill of neglect that had fallen upon her, for the servants were not slow to notice and take advantage of the fact that she had fallen into disgrace with Lady Muriel.

The housekeeper found her cowering in her fireless bedroom, and was moved to pity by her small white face and pathetic eyes.

"It's too cold for you up here," she said kindly, taking her by the arm. "Come down to my room; there's a fire there."

Innocenza meekly suffered herself to be led downstairs, where she was installed on a chair by the fire and told to stay there and get warm while the housekeeper finished some work upstairs.

The servants' quarters extended through the whole basement, the kitchens and sculleries being at the back, and the servants' hall and housekeeper's rooms in front.

At this time of day the domestics were all either upstairs, or in the back premises, and the servants' hall was deserted. The housekeeper's sitting-room opened out of it, and had two windows looking on to the front area steps.

It also had two doors, the second of which opened into the long passage which ran from front to back, while the front area door was but a step away. Suddenly a shadow fell across the window and Innocenza looked up. She saw that a man had quietly descended the steps, and was peering in at her.

He was a gipsy-looking man in rags, with a basket, and at sight of him she uttered a little cry, for he wore an ivory skull.

Putting his lips close to the glass he muttered, "You must come out of this at once, do you hear? Now let's have no trouble about it, but just do what I tell you!"

His roughness was quite unnecessary, for Innocenza made no resistance. Rising meekly, she threw round her the dark cloak he produced from his basket, fastened on the straw hat he handed her from the same receptacle, and followed him quietly into the street.

Innocenza and the ragged gipsy entered the house in Hampstead by a side door.

"We managed that rather cleverly!" the man said complacently. "Have some refreshment now, girl, after all your adventures."

"Come," he continued, when she shook her head passionately. "You needn't keep that farce up with me! We're alone, and I want to know how it was you came away so willingly. I expected trouble."

Innocenza turned her head and *spoke*.

How surprised her late companions would have been at the sound of her rich, deep, contralto voice.

"I came," she said, "because I was anxious to get away from a house where I had done mischief."

"Rubbish!" he retorted. "You hadn't done anything, and that's what I complain of. Of course, when we saw the danger signal, we were bound to clear out, but to this hour I don't know why you showed it!"

"What if I showed it because for some reason my soul revolted at turning traitor to the good Samaritans who had taken me in and cared for me without

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question?" asked the girl, turning blazing eyes upon him.

"What of it?" he sneered. "Why, I should say it was a little late in the day for you to have scruples."

She flushed at his tone, but went on:

"This is the first time I have failed, but it will not be the last. That night when I feigned faintness on the doorstep and was carried into the house, I felt something within me which held me back from doing what I had to do, and in the middle of the night I tried to escape, but was discovered and taken back. Then it was I resolved to show the red light and save that household from unknown dangers."

"Unknown fiddlesticks!" he answered. "You've done more damage than you're aware of, but I found it out in time."

She was silent till he said, "Do you know who that dandy was whom you sent the other night?"

"May I take it that my faithfulness is to be rewarded?" he whispered.

"Yes!" she answered, "Lord Morcambe!"

He looked at her for a minute and observed: "And you're in love with him?"

She shrank a little but answered, "Yes, I am, and what's more I think he's in love with me, and that's why I came away quietly, for he's all but engaged to Lady Muriel, and if I'd stayed longer it might have spoilt her life, but I love him devotedly, madly!"

"My revenge," he laughed to himself, "is sweeter than I expected. How richly, my lady, will I repay every insult you offered me in days gone by!" He turned to the girl, who was sunk in thought: "What would you say if I told you you're are as good any day as your Lady Muriel? What would you say if I told you you are that young man's cousin? That your name is Geraldine Wedmoreton, and your mother Lady Wedmoreton?"

"Then—why——?" gasped Innocenza, rising to her feet.

"Why are you in disguise?" he continued. "Well, it's a long story; but in brief, it's this: I was in your mother's service as head keeper, and one day, before her guests, she insulted me. My family is as good as hers, for my father was a Hungarian nobleman, and I swore to be revenged. Your nurse took you for a walk next day in the woods; that evening you and I disappeared. That's all!"

With that he left the room, and she sank into a chair, crying bitterly.

CHAPTER VI.

It was the afternoon of the third day after Innocenza's flight before Muriel saw Douglas again. She was sitting before the fire in the boudoir. She greeted him coldly, but he was too full of his news to notice her manner.

"Congratulate me, Muriel!" he cried, "I've found my cousin!"

"I congratulate you!" she answered, without the slightest enthusiasm.

"May I tell you all about it?" he asked eagerly. "It all sounds like a romance," he went on. "Listen!" and he poured out the story.

At Blairlochran he found he had been duped, for though the Wedmoretons had had a hunting-lodge near, Geraldine had been kidnapped at their Essex estate. However, in the village he discovered an unexpected ally in an old woman who proved to have been the little Geraldine's nurse. She was a native of the place, and had been sent home in disgrace after the catastrophe.

No one guessed how she mourned the loss of her charge, but she only knew what she had reiterated over and over again, that the child had been sleepy and she had laid it on a shawl in the sun while she was picking flowers. She must have wandered further than she knew, for she never heard a step or saw a soul, and yet, on her return to the spot, she found baby and shawl gone. Of course, the simultaneous disappearance of the keeper had brought suspicion on him, but no trace of either had been found.

She declared she should know him again anywhere, and as for her charge, there was a black mole on her left shoulder, which alone was sufficient apart from her peculiar colouring.

Besides, she was wearing a miniature of her mother round her neck.

This settled the matter for Douglas. With the sanguine buoyancy of youth he made up his mind he had found his long-lost cousin, whirled the astonished old Scotchwoman off to London, installed her in lodgings, and intended to take her to Hampstead on the morrow to confront the Hungarian with her.

Muriel listened in cold silence, and offered no comment or remark during his narrative.

"Aren't you pleased, Muriel?" he asked wistfully. "I thought you'd be so glad, as you're almost a member of the family?"

She winced as she answered slowly:

"Of course, I'm glad. The only thing is, I think, you're jumping to conclusions a little too fast, and making too sure that this is your cousin."

"We'll soon set that right," he answered joyously, "but now I want just to see her for a minute, Muriel, if you don't mind. I shan't say anything to her, of course, but I feel as if another look at her would convince me."

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"You would be welcome to look at her if it were possible," she replied, coolly, "but unluckily she's gone."

"Gone!" he ejaculated, blankly. "Oh, I suppose you mean to Devonshire."

"No, I don't!" she returned, steadily. "We don't know where she has gone. One morning, three days ago, she took French leave and disappeared, leaving all the doors open."

"She's sure to be at Hampstead!" he exclaimed, starting up. "I must be off, Muriel. Good-bye."

It never entered his honest head that Muriel could be jealous of his cousin or misunderstand his anxiety about her. Five minutes after he had left her he had forgotten all except the blow of Innocenza's disappearance, and as he drove rapidly towards his aunt's house, he was wondering what he would say.

Meanwhile Muriel was left by the fire to murmur passionately:

"I hate her! I hate her! She has stolen him from me!"

Her jealousy grew greater as the afternoon went on, and when she appeared in the ballroom that night, holding a posy of flowers from a bouquet Sir Ronald Curteis had sent in the morning, he was not wrong to allow his hopes of favour to rise high.

When he came up to claim his first dance, and she remarked: "Let us sit it out, I'm so tired!" he was only too delighted to comply.

"Thank you for your flowers, Sir Ronald," she said at last, raising her eyes from her bouquet. "It was good of you to send them."

"Thank *you* for accepting them!" he replied. "You've gratified me to-night as I never expected or hoped."

She did not check him as usual, but looked down silently, and the flowers trembled as if a breeze had passed over them.

"Is it a favourable sign?" he whispered edging nearer. "May I take it that my faithfulness is to be rewarded."

"It depends upon the reward, does it not?" she queried lightly.

"You know well enough what I want," he answered passionately. "You know that since the first day we met I've loved you madly! Ah! give me at least one word of hope to feed my starved heart upon! Let me have something to look forward to!"

He had expected to be stopped long ere this, but had gone desperately on, for he really loved this fair, proud beauty and longed to win her.

"Tell me what you would wish?" she murmured softly.

"Muriel," he gasped, "do you know what you are saying? Do you mean it? Will you really be my wife?"

"If you wish it," she replied, and, carried away by delight, he bent and kissed her.

* * * * *

Meanwhile, Douglas had made his way to Hampstead after leaving Muriel. He had no difficulty in finding Plane Tree Walk, but the house was closed, and a "To Let" board had been planted in the wilderness of a garden. Inquiries in the neighbourhood revealed nothing—the former occupants, quiet people, had left, that was all. In despair he retraced his steps to his aunt, and suggested the employment of detectives, but she would not hear of it.

"I could not bear my child hunted like some criminal," she said.

It was not till the next afternoon at the club that he heard the news of Muriel's engagement. He overheard two men he did not know talking about the ball; they were sitting close to him, and much as he would have wished not to listen, when they mentioned Muriel's name he could not resist.

It was clear from what they said that she was indeed engaged to Sir Ronald. She had danced with him continually, and his air of proprietorship was unmistakeable; moreover, a well-founded report was about that he had been seen kissing her in the ante-room. So wags the world.

For a while Douglas sat as if stunned. Then his first thought was to go to her for corroboration. When he reached the house, he was outwardly calm, but inwardly in a state of terrible turmoil. He was shewn up to her boudoir. As she rose to meet him, she looked more lovely than ever, but he took no heed, and gave her no greeting.

"Is the rumour true?" he asked.

"If you mean am I engaged to Ronald Curteis, yes!" she answered.

Douglas stood for a second wavering, and then, afraid to trust himself to speak, he turned, and left the room. Muriel took half a step forward as the door closed, and called after him with a sort of choking cry. Then the whole world she had lost swam before her eyes, and she fell in a dead swoon.

It was not till late that evening that Douglas had sufficiently recovered from his severe shock to think what he should do. And then he felt he could not sleep, and so sought some means of diversion, no difficult thing for a society man as a rule. It was not in this case. He remembered that a Russian princess whom he knew was giving a ball for which he had received a pressing invitation.

Neither the Babbacombes nor Sir Ronald were in this "set," so there was no danger, and when he entered the house in Portman Square the music and the crowd served to amuse him.

The Princess received him with pleasure. He chatted as long as politeness required, and then wandered through the rooms. At last he arrived in one where skirt-dancing was going on, and being able to see over the heads of the crowd, saw, to his amazement, that Innocenza was the performer.

The graceful dance brought her nearer, and his fixed gaze of astonishment attracted her eyes. With a startled cry she slipped and fell, but was up again in an instant and continued her dance to the end.

His intention was to intercept her as soon as she finished, but she was too quick for him. Before he could penetrate the crowd between them she had vanished, and search as he would he could find no trace of her.

He was slowly descending the stairs on his way out, when sudden faintness overtook him and he turned ghastly pale. The Princess, who was near at the time, was much concerned.

"Why not remain here for to-night?" she exclaimed hospitably. "You really look quite ill, and are not fit to face the cold. It is strange that this is the second attack of illness in this house to-night. My little

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skirt-dancer has sprained her ankle, and had to be accommodated with a bed, as she was too bad to go home!"

This silenced Douglas' protestations.

He was soon installed in a luxurious bedroom, but sleep forsook him. The illness had passed but his senses were all on the alert, and when he heard a stealthy footstep creeping past his door instinct made him spring out of bed and hurry on a few clothes.

By the time he was ready the footstep was creaking downstairs, and he rapidly followed across the landing and on to the door of a room where he knew the Princess kept her jewels. In it glided and he heard sounds that convinced him robbery was the motive. For a moment he thought of rousing the household but mercifully repented. Instead, he stepped quietly inside and switched on the electric light. Setting his back against the door he faced the thief, and—confronted Innocenza, her hands full of jewels and the safe beside her broken open.

CHAPTER VII.

"You!" he gasped.

She was still in her dancing costume, and a miniature ivory skull lay at her feet. She dropped her glittering burden and covered her face with her hands, but at his voice she lifted her head again and faced him boldly.

"Let me go!" she cried piteously. "Let me pass out of your life as I passed into it and become again the outcast I am!"

Even in his mental confusion and bewilderment he was struck at the apparent miracle that had taken place.

"You're not really dumb, then?" he exclaimed.

"No!" she said. "That is of a piece with the rest. I was taught to practise this deception because it earned pity for me and diverted suspicion."

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Stealing!" she re orted defiantly. "I have been brought up as a profe sional burglar, although this is the first time I have ever actually stolen anything myself. My part has been to get an entrance into the house and then prepare the way for the rest of the gang."

"Then your faint on the steps of Babbacombe House ——"

"*Was* a feint!" she interrupted fiercely. "I was as sensible as anyone all the time, and when I was carried in, I meant to open the doors for the others, but something stopped me, and I showed the danger signal instead."

"And your sprained ankle to-night?"

"Was another lie," she said sullenly. "I've been taught skirt-dancing so as to get engagements at grand houses and make it easy to rob them."

"You must not be found here," he said desperately; "and yet, how get you out? How—explain? I have it! Sleep-walking! That's the thing!"

"I'm afraid they will scarcely believe it," she answered bitterly. "I'm only a poor skirt-dancer to them. No—no, let them know the truth."

"That's impossible!" he exclaimed firmly. "You do not know who you really are, or you would not counsel such a proceeding."

"Yes, I *do* know who I am," she replied unexpectedly. "Your cousin!"

"Who told you?" he asked.

"My adopted father," she answered, "who is probably at work in the basement and waiting for my share of the spoil. Hadn't you better alarm the house?"

"Listen!" he said quietly. "If you will give me your word of honour that you won't try to get away, I'll lock you in here and keep off the police till I can smuggle you quietly out of the house. Will you promise?"

"Yes!" she answered, with a steady look into his eyes. "I promise."

There was only one door in the room, and the window was strongly barred, so after a glance round he gathered up the radiant heap of jewels and thrust them into the safe.

Scarcely had he done so than the handle of the door was turned outside, and a voice which he recognised as that of the Princess exclaimed:

"This is where the voices came from, and the door is locked inside! Break it open!"

Quick as thought he switched off the electric light, unlocked the door, and taking out the key, opened the door just wide enough to slip out.

Shutting it behind him he coolly locked it, and put the key in his pocket, ere turning to face the motley crowd in the corridor.

As the Earl appeared, the Princess clutched his arm.

"You have caught one of the burglars," she eagerly exclaimed; "is he in there?"

"I've locked the door, so it's all right," replied the Earl evasively; "but before we do more, might I ask if you've secured the burglars in the basement?"

"One of them we have, my lord," interposed the butler; "he seems to be a foreigner. Shall we send for the police?"

"Before they come I want to see him," said Douglas. "Might I suggest that every lady had better go back to bed?"

The crowd drifted away till only the Princess was left. She eyed the Earl askance, but her nationality led her to take things calmly, and she did not seem much surprised at his words or actions.

"If you will grant me an interview to-morrow," he said humbly, "I will explain all that may seem odd."

"It is to-morrow now," she said with a little laugh, pointing to the sickly daylight struggling through the corridor window; "I will wait in my boudoir till you come."

With this she swept away, and the Earl descended to the basement, where he found the Hungarian carefully guarded by two stalwart footmen.

The man was sitting sullenly in a bare little room, and merely looked up defiantly when the young nobleman stood before him.

Dismissing his guards, Douglas faced him with folded arms, and at last said quietly:

"At length you are caught and my cousin found. The only wonder is you have escaped so long."

"Easily explained," retorted the man insolently. "As soon as I had stolen the child I made tracks for Hungary. Your aunt was prostrated by grief, your uncle dead, and the servants incapable and dishonest, so I made my escape without let or hindrance. Once in my native country there was no danger, and I took care not to leave it till the hue and cry were well over."

"I see," said Douglas thoughtfully. "Fortune favoured

R. Norman Silver's best novel, "The Golden Dwarf."

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you, and no doubt would have continued to do so had you not relaxed your cunning. The mistake you made in sending her to a house where I was a constant visitor——"

"Are you sure it was a mistake?" asked the man significantly. "On the contrary, it was all part of my revenge. I knew that the girl's death would be forgotten in time, but disgrace is never forgotten! So I trained her to be a professional thief, and bided my time. We have never been caught before, but I meant that one day we should be caught, and then I intended to proclaim to the world her name and rank, and say to the proud woman who insulted me: 'That is your child in the grasp of the police, handcuffed and sentenced to prison for stealing'; and I knew that that moment my revenge would be complete, and old scores wiped out!"

The Earl stood aghast.

Such a subtle revenge would never have occurred to him, and yet he appreciated its completeness at its true value. His aunt would never survive the public disgrace, and, at best, the stigma could never be removed, even if the whole thing were hushed up.

"Of course, I never meant her to be found by you," continued the gipsy, "and you have anticipated me a little; but even if you protect her, as, of course, you will try to do, still I shall publish the facts before the police-magistrate to-morrow, and when I am released I shall take care to spread the whole story."

Douglas hesitated. It was repugnant to his whole nature to bribe such a scoundrel, and he knew it would probably mean hush-money for the rest of their mutual existence, even if the man consented to forego his revenge; but, for the sake of his unhappy aunt and cousin, he was turning the idea over in his mind, when the Hungarian suddenly made a dash for the door. Douglas had forgotten to lock it on entering, and the man was outside in the twinkling of an eye. It never became clear why he made this bid for liberty, for he only got halfway towards the door when one of the footman saw him, raised his revolver and fired. The man reeled and fell, and Douglas, coming up at that moment, saw at a glance that he was dead.

Giving orders for the body to be removed and the police sent for, he rapidly mounted the stairs, quieted those of the household who were alarmed at the report, and then joined the Princess in her boudoir.

"Princess!" he said abruptly, "can you keep a secret?"

"If I could not I should be at this moment in the mines of Siberia!" she answered.

Then without further preface he poured out his story, while she listened in silence.

"You have not lost a single jewel," he said in conclusion, "the police need only be told that this man was shot while trying to escape, and only you and I need know who was locked up in your jewel-room. Be merciful as you are strong, and spare our family this disgrace!"

"Say no more!" she answered meaningly. "I will act as if you were my son. Go and release your prisoner and bring her here."

* * * * *

When Muriel woke out of her swoon, it was only to the worse result of an attack of brain fever. Incessantly she raved in her delirium of her revenge upon Douglas by means of her engagement to Sir Ronald. How it leaked out was never known, but by the time she was convalescent all Society was aware of the fact that she had engaged herself to him out of mere pique, and was really, as everyone had always said, in love with the Earl. Sir Ronald himself heard of it, and as soon as he was permitted to see her he called.

"Muriel," he said, after a few words of congratulation on her convalescence and a spell of everyday talk, "the nurse will only let me stay with you five minutes longer, and before I go I have something I wish to say to you, something that will, I think, be welcome to you."

"What is it, Ronald?" asked Muriel, with no thought of what he really wished to say.

"I think we have made a mistake, Muriel," he went on gently. "I think we did not thoroughly understand one another that night at the ball——"

"What do you mean?" interrupted Muriel.

"I mean that it will be a mistake for us to marry one another, dear. I mean that I should like you to release me from my engagement."

"But——" objected Muriel,

"You are too ill to argue, you know, and here is the nurse at the door to turn me out. I have already overstayed my allotted time."

They took one another's hands, and Muriel's eyes thanked him. She could not trust herself to speak. The old days of chivalry were after all not dead.

Douglas and Muriel never quite knew themselves how it was managed, but the Duchess and Lady Wedmoreton, having stepped into the breach, were not likely, old campaigners as they were, to retreat until they had effected their object, which was to bring the two young people together again. They succeeded perfectly. When at last they met, Muriel still thought Douglas was to be married to Innocenza.

"I want to ask your pardon," said Muriel at last, "for my ill-temper, and to say that I have bitterly repented of it. I wish you all happiness, and some day, perhaps, you will let me be friends with you and your wife."

Douglas looked almost with awe at this humble, gentle girl, and his voice was husky as he said: "Let bygones be bygones between us, Muriel. I, too, was to blame; but as for my wife, you cannot be friends, for I have no wife."

"But you will have," she murmured.

He did not contradict her; and she sank into a chair and, bowing her head on her hands, cried for very weakness and weariness. Then she felt a caressing touch on her hair, and heard a low voice say tenderly:

"Shall we begin again, Muriel, and profit by our mistakes?"

She scarcely dared believe her ears, but one look at his face convinced her.

"I have had a bitter lesson," she sobbed. "One I shall never forget."

"And the ring must be of sapphires this time," he said kissing her. "You know the old rhyme—

"Green's forsaken and yellow's forsworn,
But blue is the truest colour that's worn."

* * * * *

Lady Wedmoreton and her daughter went to reside abroad, and Innocenza kept her own counsel, so that her secret died with her in that far-off land whence she never returned.

The End.

"The Golden Dwarf" begins the week after next.

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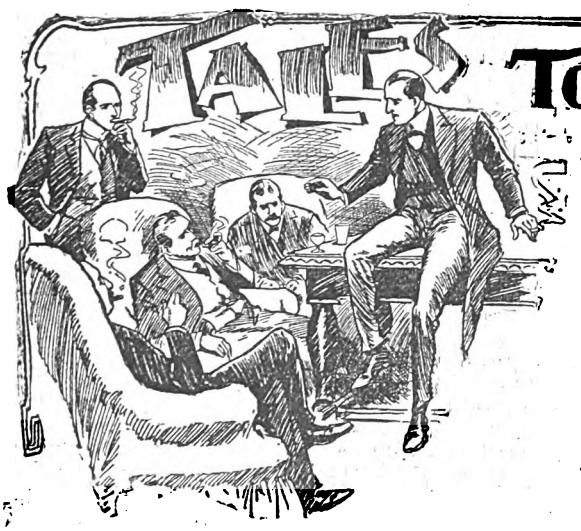

Told off Duty.

A Desperate Stratagem.

Told by the Lock-Keeper.

"Dear me, dear me! Another suicide from Waterloo Bridge. A young, well-dressed man was seen to throw himself off the parapet this morning at half-past two, and nothing has been seen of his body since. Lord, what romances the murky Thames could reveal if it only had a gift of speech!" And so saying, Bill Dryden, the fireman, relinquished with a sigh the evening paper he had just been perusing.

"Ay, there's no mistake about that," observed Jonas Myers, a square man of about fifty, with a face scorched deep-brown by long exposure to the sun. Jonas was not a member of the club, but was there on this night merely as a guest. "Mighty mysterious, this great London, surely! But as regards the river hereabouts, it don't hold the monopoly of romance, I assure you. The upper reaches of the Thames have their tragic stories, too; among them one that unfolded itself under my own eyes."

There was something ominous in the guest's manner of utterance, something that seemed to command attention. Pressed to recount the story to which he alluded, Jonas Myers began:

"I've been a lock-keeper most of my life. As a boy, I helped my old father—God rest his soul!—and when I became a man, the Thames Conservancy, to whom I applied, were kind enough to give me charge of the lock at Ingfield, a quiet bit of a place up towards Oxford

"I a'in't going to say that lock-keepers are too well paid; but being a single man, what with my wages and an occasional bright shilling from a good-hearted boating party, I was able in the course of years, to pack up a little parcel of about thirty pounds. Not being a man to let money get rusty, I purchased two or three pleasure boats out of my savings, and so well did these let, that I was able, after a time, to add other craft, and to employ a couple of hands—a man and a boy—to help me in my double business.

"Now, as these two have a good deal to do with my story, I may be permitted to tell you something about them. The man—Mike Deever, by name—was a powerful, swarthy chap, with queer, shifty eyes, and a lank face the reverse of prepossessing. But you don't consider looks in engaging a boatman, and Deever was about the handiest man with an oar, punt-pole or fishing-rod, that I have ever seen. He could have done very well too, could Mike, for tips from angling parties were frequent in the season, and many a crown did he get for a pike or barbel, from gentlemen anxious to have a catch to show when they reached home. Unfortunately, Deever was a little too fond of raising his elbow, and that habit, as you know, and the habit of saving money never do make close pals of one another."

"That's true!" remarked Jim Chilvery, the engine-driver. "When a man's fond of the bottle, gold, silver and copper melt and run out of the neck of it."

"The boy I mentioned," continued Jones, nodding his head in approval of the sententious Chilvery, "was about sixteen, honest as the day, hardworking as a horse, but just a little bit touched here," and the lock-keeper tapped his forehead solemnly. "The boys about the place called him 'Daft Joe.' Howsomever, that's enough about him at present. Let me get on with my story.

"It was on a beautiful September afternoon that Mike Deever came to me, saying that young Mr. Horton, son of the neighbouring squire, and another gentleman named Mr. Lester, required him on a fishing expedition. Miss Grace Ford, a beautiful young lady to whom the young squire was engaged, was also to be of the party.

"'Right you are, Mike?' I said. 'Where are you going?'

"'To the Black Pool, master.'

"'The Black Pool—the most dangerous spot on the river.'

"'Well,' said Mike, 'the gents will go there on account of the fishing being good.'

"'Very well, Mike, then you must go. But don't get too close to the weir. What a calamity it would be if anything were to happen to Mr. Sydney Horton or to Miss Grace, the handsomest pair in England. Take my humble duty to 'em Mike, and tell Mr. Sydney that I hope he's recovering his strength after the fever. And be sure and take care of 'em, Mike.'

"'Trust me for that, master,' and so saying, Deever set off.

"After he had gone, I looked about for Daft Joe, to tell him to keep an eye on the boats during Mike's absence; but Joe was nowhere to be found.

"'Off on one of his mad fits, I suppose,' said I to myself, 'I'll have to get another boy in his place.'

"I don't know why it was, but somehow, as I sat on the great lock-gates that afternoon, gazing into the cool

You will be fascinated by "The Golden Dwarf."

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water, my thoughts grew melancholy. Somehow my own words about a possible danger to Mr. Horton and his young lady, rang in my ears. The Black Pool was indeed a place to be feared.

"It was about half-a-mile from my cottage, and was a great basin, a hundred and fifty yards wide, into which the water poured in thousands of tons over a long weir, and lashed itself into boiling white foam as it plunged headlong forward for a few yards, and then eddied and swirled in fantastic form, as the strong cross-currents below, gripped it and spun it round like myriads of tops. Beyond the influence of these currents, the water formed a startling contrast, its great depth lending to it a hue like jet. From this peculiarity the pool derived its name. More than one intrepid man, venturing in his boat too near the fierce weir, had been overturned and drowned, in my experience. Perhaps it was the memory of these things that saddened my thoughts that afternoon.

"It was two or three hours later—about half-past six—when, in the gathering dusk, I was sitting outside my door enjoying a quiet pipe. Suddenly, to my astonishment, I beheld a figure, which I knew at once to be Daft Joe's, running excitedly along the tow-path. As he drew nearer, I could see his arms wildly waving. Something serious was the matter.

"'Joe! Joe! What is it?' I inquired, rising rapidly to meet him. 'Why, you've been in the river!' for I now perceived that his clothes were streaming with water. 'What is it? Speak up, can't you?'

"'Murder! Murder! That's what it is!' shrieked the demented lad, his face working convulsively. 'Murder! murder! Mr. Sydney! Miss Grace! Murder! murder! or something like it!'

"That was enough for me. I was off at his side in a moment, my brain all awhirl with wild fancies.

"We came in sight of the Black Pool, and I strained my eyes to pierce the evening gloom. Not a sight of the fishing party. But in a declivity of the bank, which we reached presently, a strange sight met my eyes.

"Four streaming figures were there. Mr. Horton, himself very white and weak, was endeavouring to restore animation to the senseless form of his young lady, while Mike Deever and Mr. Lester were wringing the wet from their outer garments.

"I didn't waste time by inquiring what had happened, or how. All my present anxiety was to get the half-drowned party to my cottage. Arrived there, young Mr. Horton, exhausted by his immersion, and overwrought by his anxiety about Miss Ford, swooned right away. The doctor whom I sent for, declared that the young lady would quickly recover, but that in view of the weak state of Mr. Horton, things might go harder with him.

"Later on I heard Mike's story of the accident. The punt, he said, had been caught in a strong current and driven close to the weir. The surging waters had poured into the boat, rapidly sinking it, and precipitating them into the water. On looking about him, Deever had discovered Mr. Lester supporting Miss Ford and making for land while Mr. Horton seemed to be swimming in the same direction. On reaching the land safely himself, however, he had been surprised to find Mr. Horton waving his arms about as though seized with the cramp, some distance from the bank. Fearing for the gentleman's safety, he was just about to plunge in to his assistance, when he observed that Daft Joe, whom previously he had not noticed, had already gone to the rescue of the helpless man.

"That was Mike Deever's version, and it sounded feasible enough. Indeed, it's astonishing how plausibly the devil always puts a case. But there was another side to the story, which was furnished me by Daft Joe—a side that threw a new and terrible light on the whole business.

"A few days before, it appeared, Mr. Lester had visited Mike Deever, and in the seclusion of the boat-house, had had a long confab with him. This Daft Joe had overheard. And what do you think the confab was about, gentlemen? Why it amounted to this: That Mr. Lester was filled with a mad desire to marry Miss Grace Ford, who was an heiress, by the way; that, consequently, he nourished a fierce and jealous hatred for his successful rival, Mr, Horton, who stood in his way to happiness and fortune. His only hope lay in removing Mr. Horton for ever from his path. To accomplish this, he was seeking Mike Deever's aid. The villain and his unscrupulous dupe then arranged their plan. They were all to go on a fishing excursion. They were to be capsized; Lester was to earn the gratitude of Miss Ford by saving her life, while Mr. Horton was to be left to his fate, his weak state of health being deemed sufficient to prevent him reaching land.

"For his assistance in this dastardly scheme, Deever was to have fifty pounds down, and a hundred pounds more on the day that Lester married Miss Ford. To insure the capsizing of the punt, Deever had cut a hole in the bottom, plugging it with wood in such a manner that a vigorous kick would displace it.

"All this dark plot, Daft Joe had discovered. Thinking in his own weak mind that if he told anybody, they would treat his story with incredulity, and take his words as indicating his wandering mind, he had hugged the secret to his breast, and simply watched events himself. From among the rushes on the bank, he had watched the party for several hours, and as I have told you, was, at the critical moment, the means of saving young Mr. Horton's life.

"On the strength of this story, the two scoundrels were arrested, the recovery of the punt, a few days after, corroborating the evidence regarding the temporarily-plugged bottom. Brought before the magistrates, Lester and Deever were remanded, pending the recovery of Mr. Horton, whose evidence, of course, was required.

"When that gentleman did recover, his grief at finding that Lester, whom he had long regarded as a friend, was really a murderous enemy, was pitiful. But he gave his evidence.

"Not to drag the story out unduly, let me say that Mike Deever, finding his case hopeless, made a clean breast of the affair. Lester, on the other hand, remained callous and insolent throughout the trial. The upshot of it all was, that Deever received five years' penal servitude, while Lester was sentenced to double that length of imprisonment.

"As for Miss Grace Ford—well, within six months she became Mrs. Sydney Horton, and to this day they are the happiest couple living. Mr. Sydney has a valet, the most faithful servant that man ever had. His name is Joe, but the village boys don't call him 'Daft Joe' now."

Kindly pass Short Stories on to your best girl.

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A FOOL BELOVED.

THERE is no doubt that the Lady Anstice was beautiful. No man might gainsay that. Yet had she the devil's own temper once her will was thwarted, and the pride of all the proud Riderwoods was hid in that white body of hers.

'Tis five years since I had, like the lovesick lad I was, stammered out the confession of my love to her—which she had doubtless guessed long since—for maids have ever a keen eye in such matters. And as I stood before her a-blushing and stammering as I say, she must needs burst out a-laughing at me for my trouble—telling me, "she could never wed with a boy such as I."

Whereupon, my timidity giving place to my anger, I told her straightly what I thought of her conduct, telling her she was a vixenish maid and much besides that I have forgot. At which she did but laugh the more. So that I vowed I would ride to the wars in Flanders.

"Prithee, do," says she.

"Ay!" says I, "that will I, and never see or think of thee more."

"Think of me," says she, looking up neath those black lashes of hers, "think of me—nay, that you needs must, despite yourself."

So, I turned to leave her, vowing I never would.

For a moment she put forth a hand as she had stayed me—then turns from me, though whether to laugh again or whether to weep, I know not.

And so it came to pass that I, Richard, the last of the Claverings, shut up the old Hall and, turning my back on Clavering village, set out for the wars, keeping my word right manfully.

Yet in one particular I failed; for, try how I would, I could nowise rid myself of the vision of my lady as I had last seen her—looking roguishly up at me, the whiles she had said:

"I must needs think of her."

And, truly, I have often enough in these last five years, and in mighty strange situations; as in the wild hurley-burley of some thundering charge, or lying out in the open, 'neath the stars—away there in Germany—I have wondered to myself whether 'twas to hide a laugh or a tear that she had turned from me that day long ago in the old rose garden at Clavering.

But that is many a long year ago, and since then the beardless youth had changed into the bronzed, fierce-moustachioed cavalier. Since then I have stormed through many a hard-fought breach, or watched the smoke-clouds roll up from many a doomed city, giving and taking shrewd blows between whiles, with cheerful spirit, as becomes a merry free companion.

Thus for the past five years have I lived, neath the banner of Gustavus the Lion, gaining the love and respect of many of these hardy soldiers of fortune, for that the long rapier I wear, doth ever rest somewhat lightly in its scabbard, and nought carrieth such respect amongst them as a quick eye and strong wrist—and there I should be now like enough, a-laughing and a-fighting with the best of them, but for a chance word let slip in my presence, the which needs sending me posting across half Germany, back to England and sleepy little Clavering; and this naught in the world but that the Lady Anstice Riderwood was about to wed a certain Sir Ralph Carnaby.

'Twas with this very thought in my mind then, that I galloped into Clavering village one evening just as the dying sun, casting great splashes of red on gable and window, sank behind the tall firs in Clavering Park.

I stood before her a-blushing and stammering. She must needs burst out laughing at me for my trouble.

So I rode up the street, casting my eyes this way and that, recognising many a remembered face, which stared at me from open doorway or lattice, as I galloped past.

Small wonder that none should recognise me after all these years, nor was I displeased, for I was minded that my lady should be the first to see me.

'Twas just on the stroke of six as I pulled up before the Clavering Arms to slack my thirst and beat the dust from my cloak and beaver. And then it was I noticed several fine chariots drawn up in the yard, and as I stand looking at them, who should come waddling towards me but old Jack Truscott, the landlord, who had known me well ere ever I went away.

"A mighty fine evening, sir," says he, glancing up into my face with never a sign of recognition.

"Ay," says I, "and you do not lack for custom methinks," and I pointed to the gaily painted coaches.

Take Short Stories home to the wife.

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"Why no," says he, his fat face wrinkling up into a smile, "and, your honour, it all comes along of having a fine woman in the neighbourhood, d'ye see."

"Ah!" says I, carelessly.

"Why, yes," says he, "there be always some fine gentlemen riding this way, d'ye see, to pay court to the Lady of Riderwood."

"Judging from those coaches, there should be enough and to spare of your fine gentlemen," says I, sourly enough.

"Why, sir," he replied, half apologetically, "to-night my lady gives a grand reception, to which all the grandest gentlemen in London are come, lords and earls and the like, d'ye see. Look ye," he went on, pointing to the nearest coach, "that belongs to Viscount Dynecourt, and that to the Earl of Strathavon, and that with the red panels and gold beading to Sir Ralph Carnaby."

"Bah! enough!" cries I, furiously, and turning to where an ostler held my horse, I leapt into the saddle and galloped out of the yard, leaving the landlord staring after me in blank amazement. Now was I more than ever determined to see my Lady Riderwood without delay. Sure, thinks I to myself, I have not come all these leagues to be put off, by a parcel of smirking court gallants, be they who they may.

So without more ado I put my horses at the wall that separated Riderhood from the road, and bounded over into the park beyond. And then it was I recollected I was in no plight for my lady's presence. For my cloak was stained and weather-beaten, my doublet worn and frayed sadly where my corselet had rubbed it, and the feather in my hat woefully faded and bedraggled.

Thus it was I reined up neath the trees, pondering, chin in hand, as to what I should do.

And sitting thus, I sudden spied a tiny wicket nigh hidden by flowering creepers and which led as I knew into the rose garden. Without more ado I dismounted and, tying my horse to a convenient branch, I opened the door and passed through.

Slowly I paced up the well-remembered paths and as I walked the sweet breath of the flowers came stealing to me putting me in mind of how my lady had looked when last I was here, and many things concerning her beside. Crossing a velvety lawn, smooth and noiseless to my tread, I came in sight of the old stone seat, bowered midst roses and coming nearer yet, whom should I see sitting lonely there but my Lady Anstice herself.

So I advanced as one that dreams, half doubting but that I shall wake to find it but a sweet, yet empty, fancy. Of a sudden she saw me, looking up for a moment with fear and wonder in her eyes. Then I saw the colour deepen in her cheek—ay, saw it go creeping down that slender white throat of hers till 'twas lost in the laces at her bosom.

"Dick!" says she, very low, as she had spoken to herself, and comes towards me with both white hands extended, "Dick," says she again, calling me by the old familiar name, "is it indeed you?"

"Ay, Anstice," says I, "'tis I, verily enough"—and hereupon I paused, hemming and hawing like the veriest fool, for now that at last I stood before her I could find no words to say, and as for telling her what I had carried in my heart all these years, and what had brought me all these leagues, for all my inches I dared no more do so than if I were the blushing lad I had been five years agone. So I stood there the veriest coward, looking into the witching face glowing warm in its rich colouring—tongue-tied.

She gave a little sigh, and turning to where a rose-bush, ablaze with fragrant colour, bordered the walk, she idly plucked a great red rose, twisting it this way and that with nervous fingers. When she faced me again the warm blood had left her cheeks and methought them somewhat white by contrast.

"So you are come back safe from the wars after all," says she carelessly enough, I thought.

"Are you glad?" says I, "have you expected me?"

"Why yes," says she readily, "of course I am glad you are safe back, 'twould have been woeful had you come without an arm or leg, yet," she went on playfully "I marvel that so gay a cavalier should come back to dear, sleepy, old Clavering, fit only for yokels and vixenish maids," and here her red lips quivered into a little smile.

"Vixenish maids," I repeated.

"Ay," says she, "have you forgot all that you said to me in this old garden five years agone?"

"Then you have not forgot what I said, Anstice?" says I eagerly, coming a step nearer. "You have not forgot——"

"That you called me a vixenish maid, nay, sir," says she sweeping me a mocking curtsey, "I have not forgot. And that because I would not listen to a foolish boy forsooth."

"Why yes," says I, "you did call me a foolish boy."

"True, but that was five years agone," says she mockingly.

"What think you of me now, Anstice?"

"Well," says she pursing up her red lips, and letting her eyes travel slowly up from my great riding boots, to the feather in my beaver, "methinks you are grown somewhat."

"Well," says I.

"Well," says she,

And so we stood looking on each other till we both fell a-laughing.

Yet was my heart bitter against all those fine lovers of hers, and against Sir Ralph Carnaby in especial.

And presently my lady spies my melancholy visage, and must needs fall a-laughing at me.

"Anstice," says I, heaving a great sigh, "I fear me you have no heart."

"Why so?" says she, holding the red rose to her smiling lips.

"What," says I, "is there aught you really care for."

"Ay, there are my flowers," says she.

"And naught besides?"

"Methinks you are grown mighty inquisitive, sir."

"'Tis a question I have come many leagues to find out—therefore, prithee, answer," says I.

"Well then," says she, her lashes a-dropping, and the colour creeping into her cheeks once more, "supposing there be—what then?"

"Do you love him very much," says I.

She was silent awhile and flashed a quick look up at me ere she answered, then:

"Ay," says she, "I fear me, I do."

"Why, then," says I, turning away with a dreary heart, "'tis true after all, and I must needs ride back to the wars."

"Go back!" cries she aghast.

Tell us of a better paper than Short Stories and we'll take it in.

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"Ay," says I, "since you love him 'tis as well I should not meet this Sir Ralph Carnaby."

"Sir Ralph Carnaby!" cries she with eyes wide with amazement—"Sir Ralph Carnaby," then with a stamp of her foot she turns from me.

"Anstice." I began, but she turned on me with flaming eyes.

"I begin to think you a greater fool than ever," says she.

"Prithee, do not leave me like this," says I, clasping her cold hand in my burning fingers to stay her by me, "do not leave me with such words on your lips; bethink you I ride back to the wars to-night, and, perchance, may never see thee more."

My sword fell clattering into the roadway.

"Why, then, go," says she angrily. "I have heard of you that you are a great fighter and soldier, yet, methinks, you are even a greater—fool."

So she leaves me standing alone in the old garden wondering at her words and mighty cast down. Well, 'twas true after all, says I, yet she need not have been so angry that I had found out. And turning to depart what should I espy lying there at my feet, but the rose she had toyed with, the rose that had felt her sweet lips.

So I picked it up and, setting it in my frayed doublet, walked away very thoughtful. And remembering the look in her eyes when she had first seen me, I felt that I was, in sooth, the greatest fool that might well be, for that I had not told her straightly what I had carried in my heart so long, and what I had come to say, despite this most cursed Carnaby.

And as I walked, thinking on these things, I came to a stop of a sudden, for, thinks I, supposing 'tis not this Sir Ralph Carnaby after all—who then should it be, and in answer comes the mad fancy that it might be I, so that I turned, half-minded, to go seek her out once more and put it to her.

"Nay!" says I, with a sigh, "let be, 'tis true enough. I am better as a soldier than a lover—'twas but a dream—let it all end here once and for all."

So I mounted, and rode away vastly miserable none the less.

'Twas the half-hour after eight as I swung into the saddle before the Clavering Arms, deaf to the expostulations of old Jack Truscott that I should tarry the night there. I rode away down the street and out of the village in the devil's own temper with all and sundry, yet with myself above all, for the opportunity I had waited for all these years was come and gone and I none the better or happier thereby. So I rode along sick at heart, my chin upon my breast, cursing my folly, and vowing never to see Clavering more. And the bright moon peeped down at me over the uplands bathing the way in her silver radiance as I rode.

Presently lifting my eyes I perceived a horse whose rider was wrapped in a great cloak, pacing slowly towards me down the middle of the road.

"Out of my way," cries I, roughly enough, "out of my way, there!"

Of which warning he took no more heed than I had been some ragged beggar, but comes slowly pacing towards me as before.

Now being in a most vile humour, as I say, what should I do, but clap my hand to my rapier, and digging in my spurs, thunder down upon him, flourishing the long blade above my head.

"Dick!" cries a sweet voice, yet with a note of alarm in it. "Dick!"

My sword fell clattering into the roadway, and I reined back my horse on his haunches.

"You, Anstice!" cries I all surprised, "you here? Methinks you should be in Riderwood along with all your fine company," says I bitterly.

"Ay, but I'm not. I run away and left them," says she with a nervous little laugh.

"Left them," I repeated, a wild hope surging up into my heart, "and why?"

"And who gave you permission to carry off my rose, sir?" says she, not heeding my question.

I glanced down to where it hung all wilted against my shabby doublet, and raised my hand to pluck it out yet chancing to look up, I read that in her sweet face I had despaired ever of beholding, and so I leaned across and caught her hand instead.

"Nay, sweeting," says I, "do but tell me why you are not among your fine company up yonder."

She gave me a quick shy glance, ere she answered, and methought she had never seemed half so lovely.

Then: "Nay, Dick, prithee do not ask me," says she bending over to fondle the glossy neck of her genet with her free hand. But this I imprisoned along with the other, clasping them both in my great fist, yet did she make no effort to withdraw them, sitting there with her sweet face a-droop like any flower.

"Tell me," says I again, "was it because you love me after all?" I felt her hands a-trembling in my grasp and when I lifted her face her eyes were bright with unshed tears.

"Oh, Dick," says she with a little smile curving her red lips, "you great, blundering, foolish Dick, to think that you should never have guessed it all those years."

Brightly the moon shone down over the uplands, and looking upon my dear lady's face, I clean forgot my former melancholy. And presently we rode back down the lane together.

"The Golden Dwarf." Don't forget it.

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THE PEGU RELIC.

By J. L. Hornibrook.

HALLOWES came to the station that night to see me off; for he said—a doubtful sort of compliment I thought—that he had nothing better to do.

I was going north for a brief spell of salmon fishing on the Solway; and as I abhor the tedium of a long railway journey I had selected a night train for choice, hoping to while away a few of the weary hours in sleep.

As luck would have it, there wasn't much of a crowd at the great London terminus, and I was fortunate enough to secure a carriage to myself. For which, in view of an undisturbed nap, I felt duly grateful.

I was leaning out of the carriage window after the doors had been closed, when Hallowes, who had stepped back a little, approached with a rather mysterious air.

"I say, old man," he whispered, with a sly glance towards the adjoining compartment, "you've got a remarkably pretty next-door neighbour in there. She's all alone, too. You couldn't do better than hop out and keep her company. She'll help you to pass away the time."

"No fear," I answered, with a stubborn faith in the virtues of sleep as a remedy for *ennui*, even when pitted against feminine charms. "I'll stay where I am."

But all the same I was interested.

Indeed I found myself craning my neck more than once, to see if by any chance I could catch a glimpse of my pretty neighbour at the window of the next carriage. But in this I was doomed to disappointment.

Just before the train started, however, she made her appearance for a moment.

The window was lowered, and out of the opening—just a few inches—came a dainty little head, and a pair of timid but most attractive eyes went round in a wistful and somewhat anxious manner.

I didn't pretend to notice her, of course; to all appearances I was deep in a conversation with Hallowes at the moment. But as she stood there, I saw out of the corner of my eye that she stole a quick, furtive glance at me, which did not appear to be wholly prompted by mere curiosity.

After that, she drew in her head, pulled up the window again, and a minute or so later we were off.

I knew there was little use in settling down to sleep for the first hour or two, and so occupied myself with my papers and magazines, of which I had laid in a fairly good stock.

From time to time, as we rattled along, my thoughts wandered to the lonely little occupant of the next compartment, and I wondered whether she found the journey wearisome, or if she had any means of killing time.

Just as I was preparing for a nap at last, a long, warning shriek came from the engine, and I knew we were rushing for the mouth of the Lichford tunnel. As there was little chance of closing an eye while the din lasted I sat up again.

The tunnel, according to what I remembered of it, was a particularly long one; and as the trains slackened speed a little just outside it generally took four minutes to get through.

To pass the time I turned my head towards the window, and kept watching the grimy brick wall as it went skimming by within a few feet of me.

"Good Heavens!"

The cry leapt from me almost before I was aware of it, for suddenly, between the window and the wall, I saw a face—a girl's face—white, palpitating with terror, piteous in its mute appeal. One glance was enough to show that it was my pretty neighbour.

Quick as lightning I dropped the window and seized hold of her. Nor was I an instant too soon; I could see by the look in her face that she was on the point of losing her strength, and shuddered to think of the awful fate which waited her in such an event.

How I managed it I cannot very well remember, but I contrived somehow to get the door open without letting go my hold of the clinging figure outside. When I had done so, I shouted to her to move clear of it and allow it to swing back. She understood, and complied instantly; I lifted her bodily into the carriage, and placed her fainting on the seat.

Not until then did I venture to glance back towards the compartment from which she had fled, though anxious enough to ascertain what had driven her to this desperate step. I saw that the door was swinging about on its hinges, but there was no sign of a pursuer anywhere. Not a soul was in sight down the whole length of the train.

By this time we had shot out of the tunnel, and I turned my whole attention to the girl. She was lying back, white and still, in the corner where I had placed her; her eyelids closed, her pretty head drooping slightly to one side. She had fainted!

For a moment or two I could only stand and gaze helplessly at her, utterly at a loss to know what to do, or how to set about reviving her. I'm afraid I am a bit of a duffer in a case of this kind, and in the present instance felt myself in a most awkward and painful dilemma.

One thing was possible, however. I noticed that her hand was raised to her throat as if she had been making a vain effort to loosen the neckband of her tight-fitting jacket, which was evidently choking her.

It was no time for ceremony. Without a moment's hesitation I unfastened the neckband myself, threw back the lapels of the jacket, and in doing so made a surprising and rather startling discovery.

Fastened around her neck, where it had been carefully concealed from sight, was a curious-looking jewelled collar, of priceless value apparently, with a massive, antique ornament, also a blaze of jewels, suspended from it. The whole gave one the impression of barbaric splendour, of having been for centuries the treasured possession of some line of dusky Eastern potentates upon whose breasts it was wont to glisten.

While I was still staring at it in blank bewilderment,

R. Norman Silver's best novel, "The Golden Dwarf."

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the girl opened her eyes, raised her drooping head; and then, as if prompted by some sudden recollection, glanced down. Instantly, with a faint cry of alarm, her trembling fingers set to work feverishly to conceal that glittering relic, while she looked at me with a sort of shrinking fear and distrust.

The situation was highly embarrassing, to say the least of it, and I hastened to explain. For some little time she appeared to regard me with uneasy doubt and suspicion, but at last I succeeded in convincing her as to the honesty of my intentions.

Still, the thought that I had lighted upon this secret of hers, appeared to weigh upon her in a strange degree. Indeed she begged of me not to reveal the fact that she had an ornament of such surpassing value in her possession; said that it had been intrusted to her to hand to a certain person up north, and that she had been strictly enjoined to exercise the utmost secrecy all through.

That the object of her mission had leaked out already, however, there could be little doubt. Someone was evidently on her track, for she told me that, just as the train entered the tunnel, a man had suddenly made his appearance at the off door of her compartment, which he must have reached from one of the carriages lower down, and she was horrified to see that he held a revolver between his teeth. Wild with terror, she got out on to the footboard and edged her way along it in the hope of attracting my attention.

The moment the train pulled up at Crewe I jumped off and called the guard. To him I gave a hasty account of the adventure in the tunnel, omitting all reference to the jewelled collar, however. A search was instantly made; but though the young lady's hand-bag, broken open and evidently hastily overhauled, was found in the next compartment, there was no sign of the ruffian who had forced an entrance from the footboard. He must have slipped off the train as it was gliding into the station.

When I returned to the girl with this report she appeared greatly relieved, and we took our seats again in the train. On resuming our journey we fell to chatting as if we had known each other for years. The young lady informed me that her name was Miss Mowbray, and that she was bound for Carlisle, at which station, as it so happened, I myself intended to alight.

We got on so well together, and the time passed so pleasantly in chatting to her, that I by no means regretted having forfeited my sleep. Indeed, I was fast coming round to the belief that there was nothing like agreeable society for whiling away the tedium of a long train journey, especially when I looked out through the carriage window and found, to my surprise, that we were already within a few miles of Carlisle.

And at this point I noticed that my companion began to grow restless and fidgety, occasionally losing the thread of the conversation altogether. She had been informed, it appears, that a gentleman would meet her at the station on her arrival. He was quite a stranger to her, but she was told to look out for a tall man with a black moustache, and wearing a lemon-coloured glove on his left-hand. By these tokens—especially the glove—she was to know him, and I think her anxiety was caused by an uneasy doubt lest he should fail to turn up.

If such was the case her fears proved to be well grounded, for when we alighted from the train not a soul came forward to meet her. I looked around in vain for the tall man with the black moustache and lemon-coloured glove. There was no trace of him anywhere.

Miss Mowbray's alarm and distress increased every moment. I lingered on at her side until the train had steamed away again, and the platform was practically deserted, but still we waited in vain.

At last, when it became evident that the tall man had failed to keep his appointment, the girl turned to me in an appealing manner.

"What am I to do?" she said, struggling with her rising tears.

"Do you know anyone here?" I asked.

"Not a soul!"

Here was a nice predicament! For a young girl to be stranded at a strange railway-station in the small hours of the morning, with such a valuable article as the jewelled collar about her, too, was certainly a most unpleasant and awkward plight.

The only thing I could do was to see her to an hotel, leaving word with the railway people where she was to be found.

When I made this suggestion she fell in with it at once, for, in her perplexity and distress, she seemed to look to me entirely for guidance.

R. Norman Silver's

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We left the station together; but just as we got outside a high dog-cart dashed up, and out sprang the tall man with the lemon-coloured glove. He looked first at Miss Mowbray, and then shot a keen, searching glance at me. Taking the girl aside, he whispered to her hurriedly for some seconds, and the next moment, without giving her even the chance of holding out her hand, bundled her into the dog-cart and drove off. She had barely time to turn her head and wave an adieu to me before they were out of sight, leaving me quite staggered by the sudden manner in which she had been snatched from under my wing.

"Cool, upon my word!" I growled, as I began to recover from this set-back.

"Very," responded a voice behind me.

I whisked round, and there stood a shrewd-looking little man, who must have been concealed in the shadow of the station buildings the whole time. I remembered having seen him prowling up and down the platform when the train arrived, and noticed that he had scanned

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my companion and myself very narrowly every time he passed.

He now began to make tentative inquiries regarding the young lady, and, being slightly in a muddle about the whole thing, I answered rather at random. Taken off my guard in this way, I told him of the adventure in the tunnel, and let slip something concerning the jewelled collar before I knew where I was.

But the next second I was recalled to myself by the extraordinary and inexplicable conduct of the stranger.

"Idiot!" he exclaimed—in what connection I'm sure I don't know—and took to his heels on the spot.

Well, really I was prepared for anything after that; As I stooped for my bag I vaguely wondered if the good people of Carlisle had all suddenly taken leave of their senses, that they should go flying away in this singular manner.

I went to an hotel, intending to rest there for the day and take a slow train on to the border in the evening. As for my strange experiences since leaving London, I put them resolutely on one side, for I had no desire to get further entangled in a maze of conjecture.

In the afternoon, while I was busy with my fishing tackle, I was informed that someone was inquiring for me at the bar of the hotel. I resigned myself and requested the caller to be shown up, feeling sure that some fresh surprise would be sprung upon me in the course of the next few minutes.

And there was!

The door opened, and in burst the little man who had parted from me so unceremoniously in the morning.

"I've got it!" he cried, evidently in a state of great jubilation.

"Got what?" I asked.

"The Pegu relic, of course," he answered. "I was after the dog-cart like a shot on my bicycle, and caught our friends up at a little inn out in the country. That fellow Mostyn, or Henshaw, showed fight, as I thought he would, but I had brought a couple of others with me and we soon made him knuckle under. He was just in the act of stowing away the relic, which the girl had been ordered to hand him, when we broke in and nabbed him."

When I could get in a word, I endeavoured to explain that all this was high Dutch to me, and requested him to put it into intelligent English.

He started off by explaining that he was a detective, as I had partly guessed already, and, in common with all the police throughout the country had been made acquainted, privately, with the extraordinary theft of the Pegu relic from the British museum.

"This relic," he went on, "was brought home years ago from Pegu, where it was found adorning the neck of one of the hideous native idols. Since then it has reposed snugly in its glass case at the British Museum. The greatest care was taken of it, not only on account of its immense value, but because it was supposed to be of very ancient design.

"One fine morning, a couple of weeks ago, it was suddenly discovered that this priceless relic had vanished, and in its place lay a worthless sham, an exact facsimile of it. Suspicion turned upon Mrs. Stanhope Mostyn, who was cutting a dash in London at the time, for it appears that she had got on friendly terms with one of the officials, and had induced him to open the case so that she might inspect the jewels more closely.

"Nothing was said about the robbery at the moment—it did not get into the papers even I believe—for it was thought best to keep the matter dark lest the thief or thieves should become alarmed. The affair was placed in the hands of the smartest Scotland Yard detectives, and private information sent to all the police-stations throughout the country.

"Inquiries soon showed that Mrs. Stanhope Mostyn was nothing more than a clever adventuress, who had been at this sort of game before under a different name. The police were hot on her track, and, being hard pressed, she must have hit on the plan of sending the relic up here, where that fellow I arrested to-day, who is supposed to be either her brother or husband, was waiting to receive it.

"There must have been one other man in the business—the rascal who attempted to rob the girl in the train. I suppose he was in the secret, and it occurred to him that he might as well collar the plunder on the way, and dispose of it for his own entire benefit. Probably he would have succeeded, too, but Mrs. Mostyn, who is a sharp one, took good care the relic should be concealed upon the young lady's person, instead of being placed in her hand-bag, making up some plausible yarn about its being a family heirloom which she wished delivered to her brother in hot haste.

"It appears that this fellow Mostyn—or Henshaw, as he sometimes styles himself—has been in this neighbourhood for some time past, lying low at a quiet little inn out in the country. It was his intention, no doubt, to remain on there for the present, quietly abstract the jewels from the relic at his leisure, and get them off to the continent in small batches. Well," he concluded, rubbing his hands gleefully, "I spoilt his little game, you see, and there'll be a tidy sum dropping in one of these days from the museum authorities in the shape of a reward, or I'm greatly mistaken."

"And the girl—Miss Mowbray?" I asked.

He sobered down at once.

"Ah!" he said, "it's a bit rough on her, poor thing. There's no doubt in the world that she knew nothing of all this tricky business. She was simply the dupe of that very clever person, Mrs. Stanhope Mostyn, who made a tool of her when she wished to avoid running the gauntlet through the London police herself.

"From what the young lady tells me, it seems that she was engaged some time ago to act as Mrs. Mostyn's companion, whom she always looked upon as a fashionable Society woman. Of course she was greatly distressed when she found out the real state of the case, for it came on her quite as a shock."

"And where is she now?" I inquired.

"At the police-station," the detective answered.

"She told me that you were the only person she knew in the place and I started off at once to find you. She will come out of the business all right, of course; in fact we have wired to Scotland Yard, and if her story is confirmed, as I have no doubt it will be, we have no desire to detain her or cause her further unpleasantness. Meanwhile, you might come along and see what you can do for her."

I did come along, and without a moment's delay either. That same evening I had the satisfaction of escorting her to the railway-station and seeing her safely into the London train, promising to call upon her immediately I returned to town myself.

I kept my promise, too. It was the first of many subsequent visits, and—but that is quite another story.

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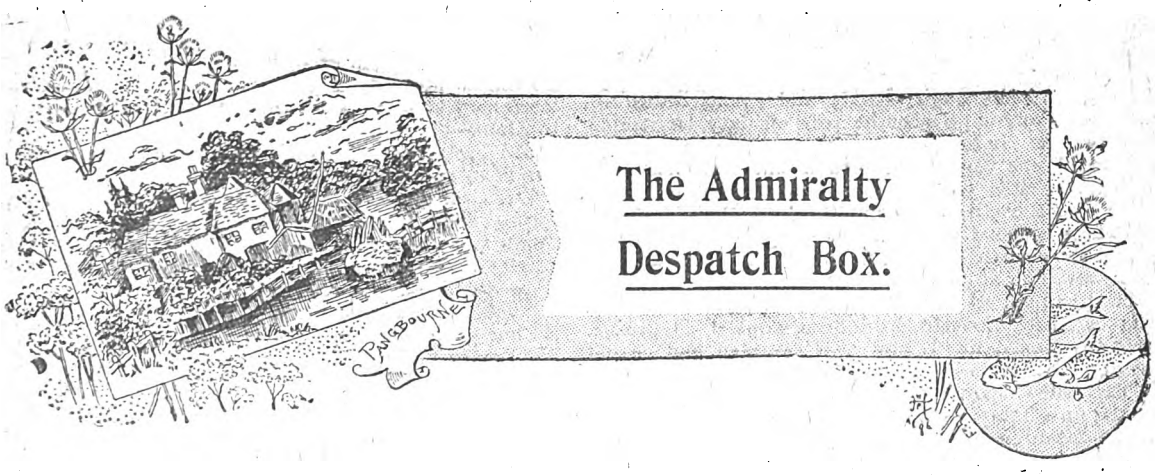

ALTHOUGH I am now at the head of a big Salvage Association, and can afford to take it easy on shore, I commenced my career under water, if I may put it so; that is to say as an ordinary diver.

Most people seem to have a very hazy idea as to the scope of a diver's duties.

They imagine that his work is confined solely to laying the foundation stones of piers and bridges, exploring sunken wrecks, and things of that kind. But that's not all of it, by a long way.

I have been called upon in my time to go down upon very curious errands—private matters, most of them. Though you wouldn't think it, I have unravelled more mysteries, the key to which lay at the bottom of the sea, than many a police officer on land.

One of the queerest experiences I ever had in this way was when I sought to recover the Admiralty Despatch Box, upon the finding of which a man's life depended—ay, and a girl's too, for ought I know.

I was down on the south coast at the time, working at one of the big seaports there, which was also an important naval station. There were two other divers on the job with me, and we generally took it by turns to make a descent.

One afternoon I knocked off pretty early, for the flood tide interfered with our work.

When I got back to my lodgings I was feeling a bit done up—no one knows how it takes it out of a man to toil for hours under water—and so flung myself on the couch in my little sitting room.

I had just dropped off into a comfortable snooze when there was a tap at the door, and my landlady made her appearance with an apology for disturbing me. She proceeded to inform me that someone had called, who wished to see me very particularly, and was waiting below at the moment.

"Who is it, Mrs. Bowles?" I asked in surprise; for with the exception of my mates, I hardly knew a soul in the place.

"A young lady," she answered with a smirk.

A young lady! The deuce it was! Now, what in the name of all that was wonderful could a young lady want with me.

I didn't stop to puzzle the thing out just then, however, I fingered my tie to see if it was in the proper place, hitched my coat straight, and requested Mrs. Bowles to show her up.

I heard their footsteps on the stairs, and the next second there tripped into my room one of the prettiest and most winsome creatures it was ever my luck to set eyes upon. You could have knocked me down with a feather, as the saying is.

But I soon pulled myself together. One glance was enough to show me that the girl was in sore trouble of some kind.

The odd part of it was, she looked at me in a peculiar, appealing sort of way, as if I was the one person upon earth who could help her out of her difficulty.

I hastened to place a chair for her, but beyond the fact that her name was Miss Helen Minton I was unable to learn very much from her at first. She sat with her head turned away towards the window, and I could see the tears glistening in her eyes, poor girl. Then, when she had choked down a little sob, she faced round again, and poured out all her trouble. This was the strange story she had to tell me:

It appears that she was engaged to a young fellow named Mark Rainsford, a clerk in the naval dockyard, whom she had known for a good many years. They were to have been married very shortly; everything was prepared; a snug little home ready, and all that kind of thing. And then just as their happiness seemed to be within reach, a sudden blow fell upon them which bid fair to wreck both their lives. It had pretty well done that for poor Rainsford already.

From what the girl went on to tell me I gathered that the young fellow's duties chiefly consisted in conveying important and secret documents, which could not be intrusted to an ordinary messenger, from the dockyard to the Admiral's office. For this purpose he had to cross a pretty wide strip of water. If he was likely to be detained long at the opposite side, as was often the case, he sent the boat back to the dockyard, giving instructions that another should come across at a certain hour.

A few days before, he left the dockyard early in the afternoon for the Admiralty office. He was to bring back with him certain highly important papers—secret plans and things of that kind—about which he was cautioned to exercise the utmost care. Everybody concerned knew that there were plenty of foreign spies knocking about the place, who would give a lot to get hold of those documents.

At the Admiralty Office Rainsford was kept waiting

"The Golden Dwarf" begins the week after next.

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until the evening. The Admiral himself placed the papers in a despatch box, which he locked with his own hands. It could not be opened again until it reached the superintendent of the dockyard, who had a duplicate key.

As it was late enough already, and young Rainsford had a good way to go when he came off duty, he hurried down to the landing-stage without a moment's delay. The night was very dark, with a thin, drizzling rain falling, so that he could hardly see a yard before him.

He found his boat waiting for him all right at the slip where he usually landed. He jumped into the stern, placed the despatch box on the seat beside him, and the men shoved off at once.

They had got about half-way across, when Rainsford, who had kept his head down on account of the drizzle, suddenly looked up to find that the men had ceased rowing. Before he could make out what they were up to, the fellow nearest to him reached under the seat, picked up a heavy piece of wood, and sprang at him.

The meaning of the whole thing flashed upon the poor young fellow then in an instant. He had fallen into a trap. This was not his boat, though one very like it, nor were these men from the dockyard. It was the despatch box they were after!

His one thought at that critical moment was to save those valuable papers from falling into their hands, no matter what else came of it. Without an instant's delay he seized the box and dropped it overboard. Even as he did so the senses were knocked out of him by a crashing blow on the head.

The rascals, being frustrated in their attempt to obtain those secret plans, must have pitched the unfortunate clerk into the tide, for a little later he was picked up a good way lower down, and conveyed to the naval hospital.

It was some considerable time before the surgeons could bring him round, and even then he was too weak to give a satisfactory account of himself.

Next morning, however, the dockyard officials arrived to question him. It appears that a boat had been sent across for him as usual on the previous evening; but on landing, the men were directed by someone in the uniform of a petty officer—it was never clearly ascertained who this person was—to go round to another slip, where they had waited in vain for hours.

Rainsford told his story, but as he watched the faces of those officials his heart sank within him.

A sudden and sickening fear gripped him. Would this extraordinary tale of his be believed? Might it not be supposed that he had purloined the box himself, knowing that he could put his own price on the contents to any foreign government, and invented that yarn about the strange boat?

The injury to his head could easily be made out to have been self-inflicted; after which he had dropped into the tide and floated down until he was picked up. This sort of thing had been done often enough before.

And, as a matter of fact, that is precisely what was supposed. His story was simply ridiculed.

The thing was looked upon as preposterous. The naval authorities refused to accept his account of the affair; not a soul believed in him except the girl to whom he was engaged—Miss Helen Minton.

"He now lies in the hospital in a dreadful state," she told me, when she had reached this point. "The thought of having this terrible suspicion hanging over his head is killing him. Even if he recovers, disgrace and ruin await him, for he has no means of establishing his innocence. He vows that he never will face the shame of it, that he would rather put an end to himself at once than live to be called a mercenary traitor. And, oh! if anything should happen to him——"

She broke down there, poor girl, put her hands to her face, and sobbed aloud.

I felt uncommonly queer about the throat myself; for somehow I had taken it into my head that Rainsford's story was true, every word of it, and I knew what misery it would cause these two young people if he wasn't cleared of suspicion.

I let the girl have her cry out, thinking it might do her good, and then got to business straight away.

"You want me to go down and try to fish up that despatch box?" I said.

"Oh! if you would only be so good!" she said, giving me a grateful look. "There is no other way of proving Mark's innocence."

"I'll have a try, at any rate," I replied. "But I don't want you to count too much upon my success. You must remember that there will be great difficulty in ascertaining the exact spot where it was dropped overboard. And unless I can obtain some idea as to that, I might prowl about down there for days without coming across a trace of the box."

But she wouldn't hear of such a thing as non-success. When she saw I took the matter up so readily, and moreover that I believed in her Mark, it seemed to lift a load from her mind.

Upon my promising to see the young fellow at the hospital that same evening, and to make the attempt the first thing in the morning, he couldn't thank me enough. She went away with a lightened heart.

Later on I called at the hospital and was allowed to see young Rainsford.

Poor fellow, he was indeed in a bad way, worrying himself to death about this wretched business. But I liked his look; he had a good honest face, and it made me all the more determined to pull him out of the hole if it lay in my power.

When I told him I was going down next morning to hunt for the despatch box, he just took my hand in both of his, looking up at me with the tears in his eyes.

Of course he could give me little information as to the spot where I was likely to find it. Considering the darkness of the night and all the other circumstances combined, it was impossible for him to state the exact position of the boat at the time. He gave me a general idea as to the direction in which they were heading and a few other particulars; and with that I had to be satisfied. I explained the whole matter to our boss that night, and he readily placed a diver's barge at my disposal for the following day. Then, when I had made all necessary arrangements, I went home and turned in.

Early next morning the barge was towed down to the scene, and anchored about midway between the dockyard and the Admiralty landing stage opposite. I made the descent, prowled about the bottom for a couple of hours, but had come up empty-handed.

Several times during the day I renewed the attempt, shifting my ground on each occasion, but always with the same result. Not a trace of the despatch box could I find anywhere.

The evening closed in at last, and I was forced to give up my fruitless search.

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I felt terribly put out about it. Somehow I hadn't the heart to go back and confess my failure to that anxious girl who was waiting and watching for me. I spoke to the three men with me and induced them to stow themselves away somewhere on the barge for the night, so that I could make one last attempt in the morning.

It came on a very cloudy night, dark as pitch, but without a breath of wind. Though my companions were sleeping soundly enough, I couldn't close an eye myself.

About midnight I went forward and sat down in the bows for a smoke. The strange stillness, the dense darkness that shut me in, and the lapping of the water against the sides of the barge seemed to throw me into a half-dreamy state, which lasted a long time.

"I have gone down upon very curious errands."

Suddenly—it must have been close upon one o'clock—I was aroused by a strange sound; the sound of muffled oars. Crouching down, my eyes went groping through the blackness on every side.

I have uncommonly sharp sight, trained to seeing things in the dark, and so after a time I made out a small boat with one man in it some distance below us. The fellow, whoever he was, seemed to be pulling round and round in a circle, and every minute or so I caught the glimmer of a light over the side.

Presently he ceased rowing and there was a soft splash, as if an anchor or heavy stone had been dropped cautiously overboard.

For several minutes he sat perfectly motionless, his head towards the barge, as if to make sure that no one was stirring there. Then he crouched down in the boat, and I couldn't make out what he was at.

Suddenly he raised himself again, and there loomed between me and the sky something like a big metal pot. Great Heavens!—a diver!

I tumbled to the thing at once. This was one of the rascals who had trapped young Rainsford and tried to relieve him of his papers. He knew the exact spot, of course—probably had marked it with a line and a piece of cork. And now, having got hold of a Fleuss diving-dress, which contains a reservoir for air at the back and enables a man to remain under water for the best part of an hour, he was going down to try to recover the despatch box.

Though he tried to conceal the light, I saw that he was armed with a lantern. The instant he was out of sight I flew to the stern, aroused my companions, and got into my diving-dress in record time. Then I was over the side after my unknown friend.

I had noted well the position of the boat, and groped my way in that direction. As I floundered along, for I daren't bring down my lantern, I caught a watery gleam of light in front. I felt pretty sure of my man now.

With my heart in my mouth I cautiously approached, and saw the fellow groping about in every direction. I got as near to him as I dared; then stood still and watched him.

He moved forward a little, and the next minute his hand shot out eagerly towards something before him. It was the despatch box!

As he bent down I stepped quickly up from behind; and just as he was in the act of clutching it, I grabbed him by the shoulder.

Now, if you will just put yourself in that man's place—down there in the silence and solitude of those murky depths, in the middle of the night, too—and you suddenly felt yourself grabbed from behind, I daresay you won't wonder that the fright seemed to kill this fellow outright.

He never looked round; he just fell forward on his face as if poleaxed.

Casting off the rope that communicated with his boat, I relieved him of his lantern, took him by one of the limp arms and dragged him back towards the barge. When we got him on board and whipped his helmet off, we found that he was in a dead faint.

Next morning I handed the despatch box over to the naval authorities, and my prisoner with it. He proved to be a man named Hammond, who, though not personally known to Rainsford, was employed in another department of the dockyard. He had worked the whole thing in conjunction with the agent of a foreign government, with whom he had long been in communication.

Rainsford was promptly reinstated, of course; and as the dockyard officials must have felt rather sheepish over the business they tried to make it up to him by giving him a step.

And before I left the South coast I was present at his marriage with Miss Helen Minton, where everybody, the young coupled especially, made a great fuss over me.

You will be fascinated by "The Golden Dwarf."

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THE PARSON'S HAT.

JOSHUA GRIMSHAW noiselessly pushed open the outer door of his counting-house, upon which was inscribed the legend, "Office Hours, nine to six," and stood for a few moments regarding his clerks, who, all oblivious to his presence, were indulging in a little idle banter preliminary to applying themselves to their books.

Then, after taking in every detail of the scene, he signified his proximity by a sarcastic "Ahem!" The effect was electrical. With a sardonic smile on his hard face he noted the sudden spurt of industry. Taking out his watch, he glared around the office. It was fifteen minutes after nine, and the chief ledger clerk's place was still vacant.

"Nephew," he snapped to the young cashier, "intimate to Tottell when he condescends to appear that I wish to speak to him." And he stamped up to his sanctum.

Five minutes later the trembling book-keeper entered his presence. Careworn and prematurely old he faced his master. For nigh on twenty years he had slaved at the desk for a miserable pittance at the best, of a man who regarded him and his fellows as so many machines which should add to his hoard.

Close-fisted and exacting, Joshua Grimshaw spared not himself or others. He was a man in whose composition was no grain of sentiment. Wealth was his god, his life, his all.

"You wanted me, I believe, sir," faltered the clerk.

Joshua fixed him with a piercing glance.

"I did, sir, and I see you know why," he returned grimly. "This is the third time you have broken the rules of this establishment. Leniency evidently is wasted upon you. You must be taught a lesson. After this week I shall not require your services. Silence!" he thundered as the man started forward beseechingly, "I want no excuses. You can go."

"For God's sake, sir," burst out the clerk imploringly, "don't turn me off like this! My wife is ill—I could not leave her——"

"I want no excuses, sir," snarled Joshua. "You heard what I said. Go; send my nephew to me."

Poor Tootell stumbled out of the room, a stony look of despair in his eyes.

A few moments later, Ned Summers, the young cashier, entered his uncle's presence. His face was flushed with indignation and undisguised contempt.

"Uncle," he burst out hotly, "you surely will not do this injustice. The man is distraught with trouble. His wife is a chronic invalid. It is cruel—inhuman!"

"Don't presume on your position, sir," snapped Grimshaw. "This business is mine, I believe? The man is unsatisfactory. You will fill his place."

"Uncle, I protest——"

"You are a fool, sir. Get to your desk."

The young man clenched his hands and bit his lips to curb the angry retort on his tongue.

"Very well, sir," he said bitterly, and turned on his heel.

"Come here, sir," said the old man brusquely. "What is the meaning of this letter? How dare this fellow, Moseley, presume to invite himself here?"

Ned Summers glanced at the paper in his uncle's hand.

"Ah, yes," he said, "Mr. Moseley informed me that he purposed seeing you. I understand that he is coming this morning."

"Ah, I see," returned Joshua sneeringly. "But if you think his visit likely to influence me, you and he are very much mistaken. The girl—this pauper parson's daughter—is no fitting match for you. I have other views with regard to you."

"Uncle," returned the young man, "I'm sorry to disappoint you, but in this I can brook no interference. Ethel Moseley is the woman I shall marry, happen what may."

"You will not make such an egregious ass of yourself," fumed the old man. "Understand me clearly. If you run counter to my wishes in this matter I disown you utterly. Not a penny of my money shall you have."

With a gesture of impatience the young man left the room.

Joshua Grimshaw took off his hat, and laying it on the table beside him, applied himself to his correspondence. Rapidly digesting the contents, he pencilled on the margin of each the gist of his reply, and threw the letters into a basket for his typist. With a scowl he tore into shreds a pitiful appeal for charity.

The door opened, and the boy announced "The Reverend Cuthbert Moseley."

"Show him in," he snapped, and the visitor entered with a cheery word of greeting on his lips.

"Excuse me one moment," said Joshua coldly, ignoring the extended hand. "Take a seat."

Cuthbert Moseley flushed, and a shadow of annoyance obliterated for a moment the habitual smile on his kindly face. Placing his silk hat on the table beside the others, he sat down and awaited Grimshaw's pleasure.

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"Now, parson," said Joshua at length, swinging round in his chair. "Have the goodness to remember I'm a busy man. What is it—subscriptions?" And he buttoned up his coat significantly.

"Still the same old Joshua," said Moseley, smiling at the action. "And what if it is—subscriptions?"

"Only this," returned Grimshaw curtly, "you'll waste my time and your own. Philanthropic faddists get no encouragement from me. By the laws of this land I am compelled to pay rates to help support a lazy set of loafers who never knew what an honest day's work was in all their wasted lives, and by so doing I perform more than my duty. Poverty is the result of extravagance and idleness. I countenance neither."

"It would be a bad look out indeed for our orphans and widows if all rich men thought as you do, Joshua Grimshaw," returned the parson. "But, thank God, they don't."

"Pshaw!" ejaculated Joshua impatiently. "I hate cant. What is your business?"

"What a misanthropical old curmudgeon you have become, Joshua," said the outspoken clergyman. "However, it is not subscriptions. I want to speak with you on a more important matter. To be brief—you are doubtless aware your nephew, an estimable young man, is desirous of marrying my daughter. He informs me you are strongly averse to the alliance. I have come to ask you why?"

"Your candour is commendable, parson," returned Joshua caustically. "I will be equally brief. As you are probably aware, he is my sole relative. All that I have will be his one day providing he conforms to my wishes, and—I do not desire him to marry your child."

"What, Joshua, does the past still rankle, then?"

"Aye, as it ever will to my dying day," returned Grimshaw bitterly. "Thirty years ago you took from me the only woman I ever cared for in this world, blighting my life and making me the misanthropical curmudgeon you say I am. If there was any scrap of human kindness in my heart, 'twas killed then. You cannot tell the bitterness that has been mine in all those years, Cuthbert Moseley. I cursed when I knew the child was given to you. I was glad when your wife, who should have been mine, was taken from you. Do you think, man, that I will allow my brother's son to marry any spawn of yours? Rather would I see him dead——"

"Stop!" commanded the parson, towering above him with arm upraised. "Stop, I say!"

And Grimshaw, clenching the arms of his chair, glared up at him wildly, choked with the impotent passion that consumed him.

The parson's hand fell to his side.

"Heaven forgive you, Joshua Grimshaw," he said. He turned for the door. "I perceive it would be useless to talk further with you. But you will please understand that the lives of my girl and the boy shall not be wrecked if I can help it. He loves her, and, if he will marry her, he shall, whether you approve or not. I have nothing more to say to you."

The door closed behind him, and Joshua Grimshaw sprang to his feet with a burst of mirthless laughter.

"Marry her!" he cried. "By my life, parson, we shall see!"

He fell back in his chair and glowered around him. Then, grasping his pen, he endeavoured to concentrate his attention on the matters before him. But it was futile, and, with an oath, he jerked the chair back and put forth his hand for his hat.

The touch of it seemed strangely unfamiliar to his head. He took it off and glared at it savagely.

"Hang the parson," he shouted furiously. "The fool has taken my hat!"

Jamming it on viciously, he went forth to his solitary lunch. Looking neither to right nor left he made his way to his club, and strode towards the corner he usually occupied. The sad-eyed waiter hastened to relieve him of his coat, for he knew "Old Grim" brooked no neglect.

"Thank you, Spink," said Joshua.

The man stared. For ten years he had waited upon this grumpy member without ever once receiving a word of thanks. Joshua looked up at him inquiringly.

"You don't look very well, Spink," he said brusquely. "You want change."

The anxious-faced waiter dropped his napkin in surprise.

"Yessir," he stammered, pulling himself together, "I could d-do with some ch-change."

Joshua, thinking the man was having a cut at his niggardliness, scowled. Then, as he glanced up at his lugubrious face, he was taken with an irresistible desire to laugh. Somehow, he knew not why, he felt highly pleased with himself. The luncheon proved more enjoyable than ever he remembered before.

Suddenly he bethought him that never once had he offered a tip to the woe-begone Spink, and the whim took him, causing him to smile, that he would try the experiment just to enjoy the effect.

"Spink," he said abruptly, "here's five shillings for you."

The man opened and closed his mouth spasmodically, unable to speak a word.

Joshua laughed hilariously, and strode away into the smoke-room. Dropping into a comfortable lounge-chair he lay back and watched the smoke wreaths curling up from his cigar.

Smoking he generally looked upon as a wilful extravagance. His present frame of mind was most extraordinary. The evolution of his ideas was strangely incomprehensible to him. For the life of him he could not understand his sudden burst of generosity, nor why he should prefer to sit quiet and smoke instead of returning to his desk and business.

And yet, after all, there was something decidedly pleasant in thinking of the look of gratitude in the eyes of the poor waiter.

He took the parson's hat off his head, and gazed at it with a whimsical look of disgust. He could not help noticing that it had seen its best days.

"Moseley always was a fool," he muttered, "giving away what he wanted himself. That's no charity. He's as poor as a church mouse, and always will be."

Mechanically he replaced the hat on his head, and, as he did so, something seemed to whisper in his ear: "What do you know of charity, Joshua Grimshaw?"

He started up and looked round suspiciously, half-fearfully. He could have sworn someone had spoken. Save for one man, who was buried behind a newspaper in the far corner, he had the room to himself. He puffed at his cigar savagely.

"What can old Grim, the misanthrope, know of charity?" continued the still, small voice. "Exacting his full pound of flesh so that he may but add to his

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useless pile of gold; grinding his poorer brethren into the dust; sweating his miserable servants to satisfy his insatiable greed. What can the grasping miser know of love or charity?"

He fidgeted restlessly in his chair.

"What the dickens is coming over me?" he muttered disgustedly.

He got up and went into the street.

A miserable, decrepit woman was shuffling along the gutter quavering an old-time ballad. With a start his memory flew back to the days of his boyhood. The song was one his mother had been wont to sing. Turning back with a sudden impulse, he gave the beggar a shilling. The woman poured out a torrent of incoherent thanks. Half-ashamedly, he strode away.

Reaching his office he stole quietly upstairs. Within he could hear the voices of his clerks, and he paused to listen.

"Tootell, old man, I'm sorry," someone was saying. "What shall you do?"

"God knows!" returned the other despairingly. "Turned off like a dog after twenty years service. I dare not tell Lizzie. It would kill her."

"He's a devil," said the first speaker, "a pitiless, cold-blooded devil."

Joshua Grimshaw started as if he had been stung. With a set, white face he made his way to his room and threw himself wearily into a chair.

This then was what his servants thought of him. "A pitiless, cold-blooded devil!" The words rankled in his brain. Rapidly affixing his signature to a score of letters, he threw down his pen and gazed blankly before him.

"A just indictment," he whispered hoarsely. "My God, a just indictment!"

His brain conjured up before him a record of his cheerless existence for the past thirty years. The face of she whom he had loved, as he remembered her in the days when the world had been glad, floated before him.

"How different everything might have been if only she had taken pity," he moaned.

The memory of that night when, with tears standing in her eyes, she had told him there was someone else, brought a cruel pang to his heart.

"Joshua," came her well-remembered voice over the flight of years, "I'm sorry, but it never can be. You must forget. No, no, don't talk so, you hurt me. It is not manly. Some other woman, more worthy than myself, shall make you forget. Be a man, Joshua."

The vision faded, and his head sank forward dejectedly on his breast.

"Be a man, Joshua," came the whisper. "You can make someone happy. The lad——"

His face lit up with a sudden resolution. Brushing the mist from his eyes, he touched the electric button before him.

"Send Tootell in to me," he said.

Presently the man entered,

"Tootell," he said humbly, "you will forgive me if I was harsh this morning. Please forget what I said to you. And, Tootell"—he fumbled in his pocket-book—"I hear you are in trouble. This small gift may help you."

The man stumbled forward with tears of gratitude in his eyes.

"There, that's all right," said Joshua smilingly. "I understand, my lad. Mr. Summers will have something pleasant to communicate to you on Saturday. Send him here, will you?"

The young man strode into the room.

"Ned," said Joshua jocularly, "that rogue of a parson took my best silk hat and left me this disreputable tile in its place. Look at it. Now do you think he would be offended if I presented him with a new one?"

His nephew stared, struck dumb with genuine astonishment. Then his face broadened into a smile.

"It is a bit antiquated, isn't it?" he laughed.

"Here, you go out and get him a Christie," said Joshua, "and when you see him to-night—I suppose you will, eh, you young dog?—just give it to him with my compliments, and tell him I shall be pleased to see him and his daughter at dinner to-morrow night at seven. You might look in, too."

"Uncle!" burst out the young man amazedly.

"You know, I rather think I'll keep the parson's old hat, Ned," said Joshua, putting it on once more. "How do you think it suits me?"

"Admirably!" exclaimed Ned. "You look another man in it."

"Egad, I feel it!" laughed Joshua. "I do, indeed."

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CHAPTER XIII. (*continued*).

HOATHLEY took his lips from his flask and grinned an evil grin.

"My dear young friend, Swinley Tasker," he said in his mock-pompous manner, "don't you see that we are inseparably bound up together, and that one cannot afford to round on the other? You know enough to hang me already, and I—well, I can do the same by you; for though you were not present personally, you yet were an accessory both before and after the very forcible fact that overtook the gentle Michael in this room the other night. No, my boy; we are in the same boat, and must sink or swim together. That ought to be enough security that I shan't baulk you."

Marion came nigh to fainting, so patent was the meaning of the vile whispers that reached her.

That deadly smooth-spoken wretch on the other side of the dark hall was the actual murderer of her father, and was in a fair way to become her own.

"Well," said Tasker, "so long as you understand that I'm to have a fair half, whether it's to-night or twenty years hence, you must work it out your own way."

"That's a wise youth," replied the elder scoundrel, "and now, instead of fooling about with arguments that may be quite uncalled for, we had better get to work."

As he spoke Marion, watching breathlessly, saw him unfold a roll of oilcloth and produce a couple of portable crowbars, the joints of which he proceeded to screw together, thus forming a brace of highly effective tools. Then, while the trembling girl shrank back further into the darkness, Hoathley, beckoning to Tasker, made for the door of the sitting room.

Together they came out into the hall, and paused close to the door of Marion's refuge. She felt that the slightest movement would betray her, and as it was, a sudden impulse might prompt them to invade the disused sitting-room.

"The question is," whispered Hoathley, "whether I first exercise a little gentle pressure on my fair relative's door, or whether we start by pulling down dear Michael's labour of love in the cellar. Our look round to-night has confirmed my impression that the money is nowhere else—unless it be in the occupied bedroom."

"Let us start on the strong room, then," said Tasker, "I would much rather you settled the other job by yourself, while I am seeing to the cash. We don't need the key. We can just as easily knock the place down from the outside, and there's no fear of her hearing us, away at the back and underground."

So they did not yet know, Marion thought, that the strong-room had already been tried and found wanting.

What would happen when the discovery was made? Even as she wondered, it seemed that Hoathley agreed with his accomplice's proposition, for they both disappeared from the range of her vision, not, as the diffused light or the lantern told her, up the stairs, but underneath them, in the direction of the cellar door.

Then the hall relapsed into utter darkness, and Marion knew that they were descending into the black depths below.

With a sigh of relief she allowed her cramped limbs to relax, and endeavoured to collect her dazed senses into a plan of action.

The paralysing effect of Hoathley's murderous playfulness had numbed her to the marrow while she listened, but with the cessation of his hateful tones her natural fortitude returned.

"If only there were a lock on the cellar door I could catch them like rats in a trap," she thought to herself; "but it is useless to attempt it without. I must make my escape while they are below, and try and get help before they leave the premises."

Gliding from her refuge Marion once again approached the front door, and was about to undo the bolts when a sudden impulse took possession of her. The pursuit of Zambra, she gathered, had been in some way checked by the criminals; why should she not play the part of a detective herself! Astonished by the discovery of the demolished strong-room, they might let fall some hint of their plans which would tend to their capture. She would creep to the top of the cellar stairs and listen before she finally fled from the house. There would be the less risk, because the men would probably overhaul the ruins of the brick-work before returning to search for her. The idea took such hold of Marion that she proceeded to put it into execution at once.

Retracing her steps, she crossed the hall to the cellar door, learning from a blast of cold air before she reached it that it had been left open. The door hinged inwards, directly on to the flight of stone steps. By stooping a little Marion was able to see fairly well what was passing at the end of the cellar, and she had the satisfaction of knowing that she herself was in total darkness. Tasker was flashing the bullseye here and there on the *débris*, while Hoathley, leaning on the useless crowbars, was bewailing the miscarriage of his plans. The younger man was evidently incredulous of his companion's sincerity.

"Stow that gush," he said angrily. "I believe you either did this the other night and have collared the lot, or else

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you knew that it had been found, and brought me here to compromise me in killing the girl."

"Honour among thieves, honour among thieves," croaked the other, leering satanically. "I assure you, on the solemn oath of an ex-solicitor's clerk, that this is just as much a mystery to me as it is to you. I can only suppose that Zambra—I wish I had knifed him—has pirated my notion and forestalled us. Our course is clear. My poor, dear, somnolent niece must be permanently effaced, and we must then carry out our original plan of temporarily effacing ourselves—only, unhappily, minus the dibs—till it is safe to claim as next of kin. In the meanwhile, a year or so in Argentina will do us no harm."

What followed happened in a tenth of the time it will take to read it. Marion, satisfied that Hoathley's words had given her a clue to the villain's intended destination, rose to make good her escape, in ignorance that, while stooping, a fold of her dress had become caught in a projecting splinter of the old doorway. The moment she moved, the silence was broken by the sound of a long, wrenching tear that penetrated to the innermost recesses of the cellar.

Unable to repress a cry of horror, Marion saw Hoathley seize the bulls-eye from Tasker and turn its beams full upon her. In an instant he was springing up the steps, with murder on his face, and Marion remembered too late that she had made a fatal error. She ought to have unbarred the house door before she came there. Her retreat was cut off.

CHAPTER XIV.

The "Kid" Wins his Spurs.

On that eventful night, though the master himself was absent, a quiet alertness prevailed in Zambra's office, not two hundred yards from Tamponi's Restaurant. Passers-by were accustomed to seeing lights in those first-floor windows at all hours, so that there was nothing unusual in the exterior appearance of the house in the old-world bye-street, but within there were signs of activity that were exceptional so late in the evening.

The private room was vacant, with the gas turned low, but in the outer office Zambra's first lieutenant, Dickson—a pensioned ex-inspector of police—remained on duty to direct the movements of such of the staff as were actively engaged. Neil Fergusson, returned from Reading earlier in the evening, was resting after his labours and preparing himself for future emergencies by taking a nap in a chair. For the present the active executive consisted for the most part of a bright-faced boy of fourteen, known to his colleagues as the "Kid," and wise beyond his years.

The son of a struggling actor, and bred in an atmosphere of mimicry, he had first attracted Zambra's attention by his wonderful personations, and having distinguished himself in a few trial "shadowing" where a boy was wanted, he had now been more than a year permanently attached to the office. Full of enthusiasm for his craft, his leading sentiments were a great ambition to be considered a detective and a boyish hero-worship of his employer. The reader will recognise him as the little match-seller, whose intrusions into the bar the temporary "waiter" at Tamponi's affected to repel so vigorously.

The "Kid" had been employed, as we have seen, in keeping up communication between Zambra and the office, and on his return from taking over the report of Fergusson's abortive journey to Kennett's Cross, he was closely questioned by Dickson as to the chief's proceedings.

"The boss is fairly on the job," he replied mysteriously. "He's going to make someone sit up to-night; I could see it in his eye."

"Tell me exactly what you saw," said the ex-inspector.

"Just as I was dodging around to give him the note, he was taking two coves in tow to serve them with dinner in a private room upstairs," said the boy. "From the way he was carrying on, I guess they are the ones he's arter."

The boy was ignorant of the details of the drama in which he was as yet only playing a minor part, his knowledge not going beyond his own instructions to convey messages without incurring suspicion. Dickson alone of those in the office was entrusted with the full particulars of the case.

"What were the men like?" inquired the manager, referring to a written description of Hoathley, with which Zambra had furnished him.

"The one who was in first, waiting for the other, was a flash-looking young fellow—a kind of sham toff," said the "Kid." "The sort of chap that wears three-ten reach-me-down 'swagger' suits, goes to Margate for his holiday, and oils his half-guinea topper. The second one—he that came in last as I got there—was an oldish bloke, rather shabbily dressed, and with a rummy twist in his eyes that makes him look all ways at once. A little in the Ally Sloper line, I should say, but not so convivial."

"Good lad," said Dickson. "Now, what you've got to do is to slip back to Tamponi's and play about outside till those two men come out. If Mr. Zambra can get away at once without exciting suspicion, and shadow them himself, you may be sure he will do so; and in that case you can come back here to report the moment he is after them. But if you find that he has been unable to make an excuse to clear out quick enough to keep them in view, you must do it yourself, and not come back here till you know they have gone home to bed for the night, or till you have ascertained where they are off to."

"Do you know where they hang out when they're at home?" asked the "Kid."

"The young one lives at Worcester Park; we have not discovered where the elder man lives—but probably central."

"If they separate, which am I to follow?"

"The old one, most certainly," replied Dickson. "And if he makes any attempts to go out of London otherwise than for the purpose of accompanying his friend home to the suburbs, take a cab and come on here sharp to report what you have learned of their destination. I can't tell you what's in the wind just yet, 'Kid,' but it's a big thing, and if you play the game right the governor will make a man of you."

"I'm on," said the boy, and vanished down the stairs to execute his orders, while grave, grey-haired Dickson sent after him an approving smile.

An hour passed, the silence in the office only broken by the snores of Fergusson, the ticking of the clock on the mantlepiece, and the flutter of the newspaper with which the ex-inspector wiled away the time. Then the "Kid" glided in again, looking serious.

"Well, have they come out?" exclaimed Dickson.

"No, they won't yet awhile, or I shouldn't be here," said the boy promptly. "The boss has just taken up another course, and then there's dessert. They're having a regular swell feed, so I shall get back long before they've finished. I thought I ought to tell you that Big Harry, the racing man, has just gone into the bar—the same that was mixed up in the turf scandal case last year."

"What of that?" said Dickson. "Mr. Zambra never had him in hand personally. It was not till after the case was finished that it was rumoured that he belonged to the gang which was broken up. I very much doubt if the governor has ever seen him—that is, to know who he was."

"That's just it," returned the "Kid" eagerly. "The boss don't know him, and so won't be on his guard, but I'll bet Big Harry knows the boss. He was in court when the case was tried, and must have seen Mr. Zambra give his

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evidence. It struck me if Big Harry spotted him through his disguise—I allow it isn't likely—he might give him away."

Dickson stroked his grey moustache and thought for a minute before replying.

"You have done right to let me know," he said at length, as he scribbled a few lines and handed them to the boy. "You must try and let Mr. Zambra have this warning, if you can see or make an opportunity. You can play the match-box racket again, I suppose?"

"I will if you like, sir; but it would be much better if I could get into the place with some excuse for staying inside," was the reply. And then, after a pause, the "Kid" pleaded shyly, but with modest confidence: "May I work it my own way, Mr. Dickson? If you give me leave I will promise you shan't regret it."

"Very well," said the manager, "only remember whether you have been able to communicate the warning or not, my instructions hold good—to come here and report if the men leave the place followed by Zambra, and if they leave unfollowed to shadow them yourself, unless you can find to a certainty where they are off to."

The "Kid" nodded and disappeared behind a screen at the end of the room, to reappear with a rapidity that would have done credit to a "quick-change artiste," completely metamorphosed into the exact semblance of the typical schoolboy home for the holidays. He had not been gone two minutes, yet not a vestige of the dirty, shuffle-footed urchin of the street remained.

In place of him there emerged from behind the curtain a good-looking lad in orthodox Eton jacket and roll-collar, with a rosy face shining with soap and water, and holding, in one hand a pair of gloves, and in the other a neat silk umbrella. So fresh and simple did he look, that for a moment the veteran Dickson almost forgot the real character and detective training of the boy, and began to reproach himself for sending such a guileless innocent into a place like Tamponi's. But the "Kid" was downstairs again and half-way up the street towards the Strand before Dickson could decide whether or no to call him back.

The sound of the closing door awoke Neil Fergusson, and the sight of the giant Scotchman rising and stretching himself, inspired the manager with the idea of reinforcements.

"Neil," he said, "Mr. Zambra is over at Tamponi's restaurant on this Kennett's Cross affair. The 'Kid' has gone there to try and put him on his guard against a racing sharp who has a grudge against him, and might make trouble or give him away to the parties he's shadowing. I want you to go down there and be on hand outside in case either of them want assistance. The boy is spry enough, so you needn't show yourself unless called on."

"Is it like there'll be fighting, think you?" asked the old Guardsman as he promptly prepared to obey orders, the question being suggested by the knowledge that it was sinew rather than subtlety that was usually expected of him.

"Not with those the Governor's after; they're more foxy than valiant, I expect," replied Dickson. "But you had better take your 'persuader' with you. The frequenters of Tamponi's are a pretty hard crowd, and it is from this man, Big Harry, and his pals that a fuss is to be apprehended—if at all. The Signor is dead against any sort of a row at his place—good reason why—but if these sporting blackguards find Zambra is amongst them in disguise, they may go for him under the impression that he is on another turf scandal job. There isn't a clean conscience among the lot."

Fergusson was a man of deeds rather than of words, and, after acting on his superior's hint to arm himself with his blackthorn cudgel, he went out into the Strand. The great thoroughfare was teeming with traffic, and ablaze with the brilliant devices over the theatres, though, as the latter had not yet given out, the throng was yet to be augmented by departing audiences. True to his instructions not to intrude himself till he was wanted, the tall Scotchman kept on the opposite side of the way from Tamponi's, patrolling up and down under the old instinct of doing a "sentry-go," but never allowing himself to be more than fifty yards from the restaurant. The gauze-covered windows gave him no view of what was transpiring within; only over the top of the quarter-glazed door a row of shiny top hats, seen dimly through a mist of cigar smoke, told him that the bar was full of flash customers.

In the meanwhile the "Kid" had got to business. On reaching the restaurant he diffidently pushed open the swing doors, and advanced a few paces into the bar. Then he paused shyly as though scared at the sudden hush of loud voices, as the customers turned to regard the apparition of the trim little schoolboy with surprised amusement. The bar was filled with its usual nightly frequenters—betting-men, sporting journalists, and music-hall artistes, with a sprinkling of well-dressed individuals who were reticent as to their means of subsistence, but one and all of them belonging to that mysterious unenrolled brotherhood of sharps known to men about town as the "clever division."

The period of the "Kid's" return in his new character was just after Zambra had taken up that last bottle of wine to the private room, and the detective was therefore nowhere to be seen, but Big Harry was still leaning over the bar in whispered conversation with Tamponi, and the tinkling of the piano overhead reassured the boy that the party in which he was interested had not yet broken up.

"Well, my little fella, and what might you be wanting?" inquired the Signor, as soon as his attention had been drawn to the round-eyed picture of innocence by the remarks of those in front of the bar.

"Please is—is father here?" asked the "Kid" bashfully, fingering his umbrella with well-simulated nervousness, and making a half-motion towards his neat little bowler hat, as though not quite sure whether he ought not to take it off in such distinguished company. The gesture was really an artfully-conceived study, for the implied respect towards a lot of men who had long since ceased to respect themselves created a friendly feeling, and secured his position from the first.

"That's rather a large order, seeing that I don't know your father's name," replied the Signor playfully. "A good many of these gentlemen are fathers; perhaps you can pick him out if he don't like to own up."

Now the "Kid" had matured his story as he came along—rapidly, but with a due regard to local colour and detail. In the course of his professional duties he had become aware that a certain well-known actor, then playing at a Strand theatre, had a son of about his own age. The actor in question was much too big a man to be an habitual frequenter of a flash restaurant, though he would be likely to be known there; and moreover, he was playing in the last piece, so that even if he did look in at Tamponi's it would not be till close on midnight. By that time the "Kid" hoped that the affair in hand would be concluded, and he therefore decided to endow this gentleman with the honour of his parentage.

"My father's name is Waring—Danvers Waring—of Kelly's Theatre," he piped in a tremulous treble. "He told me to wait for him here, and he would call for me and take me home. I have been spending the evening at Maskelyne and Cooke's."

The news that the small stranger was the son of the popular actor was received with evident interest and implicitly believed by the loungers in the bar, and the Signor waxed especially gracious.

"Mr. Waring coming here after his performance is over?

You will be fascinated by "The Golden Dwarf."

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That is good," cried Tamponi. "We do not see much of him since he become such a swell—not now for more than six months. Most certainly you come in and wait. There's a nice comfortable seat over there in the corner, unless you like to stand up and drink like a man? Oh, you mustn't, eh? Not begun to get about the town yet, I guess. Well, there's plenty of time."

The "Kid" went modestly to the corner indicated at the far end of the room, and sat down on the velvet settee which his quick eye noted was close to and nearly opposite the foot of the stairs, thus giving him an early opportunity of learning of any movement on the next floor. It was possible too, he thought, that from this position he might be able to secretly pass the note to Zambra when next he came down, for the stairs were enclosed, and anyone descending was therefore out of sight of the people in the bar. The interest in "Waring's Youngster" soon declined, so that the boy occupied his post of vantage more or less unobserved amid the clatter of resumed conversation.

He had sat there some five minutes, gazing in pretended awe at the supposed strangeness of the scene, but never relaxing his watchfulness, when the jangling notes of the piano suddenly ceased—ceased, too, not at the end of a tune, but right in the middle of an unfinished stave. A moment later, looking up the dimly-lit stairs, the "Kid" saw a burst of light on the landing, and heard the muttered hum of excited undertones as a door above was opened. From where he sat, owing to the steepness of the stairs, he could only see the open space at the very top of the door, and that quickly vanished, as though the door had been immediately shut again.

From the continued whispering above he supposed that more than one person had come out of the private room, but he would have to wait till they appeared on the stairs before he knew who they were. He braced himself for the emergency, either to attempt to give Zambra the note, or to get outside on some excuse if it should prove to be the diners, so as to follow them himself if necessary.

He was not kept long in doubt. There was a sound like the turning of a key in a lock, and then Tasker appeared at the top of the stairs, with Simon Hoathley close behind. The boy saw that the time for action had come, and it flashed across his precocious brain that as he had to make a move, it would be best to do so before the men got down into the bar, as if he left his seat after their appearance and then followed them out, he might incur suspicion from some of the numerous "wrong-uns" present. He therefore rose instantly and went forward to the counter, coughing and spluttering.

"I think I'll take a walk in the street for a few minutes; this cigar smoke is rather——" he was beginning to say to Tamponi, when he was pushed aside by Tasker, who had Hoathley at his elbow. Leaning over the counter, the diamond-broker's clerk spoke a few rapid words into the Signor's ear, of which the boy could only catch the disjointed sentences: "A crack on the knowledge-box"—"thanks for the tip"—"locked on the outside"—"nothing to connect you with it"—"two hours' start"—"take care not missed for that time"—"going out of town for a spell."

The Signor looked somewhat perturbed at the communication, but Big Harry, who was standing by, answered for him. The "Kid," hustled almost into the folds of the betting-man's voluminous overcoat, heard him hoarsely whisper: "Good business"—"old score"—"I and my pals will see to that"—"best cut away quick." Then, with a hasty "good-night," Tasker and Hoathley passed out into the Strand, leaving the boy free to repeat and finish his pliant for fresh air.

"Right you are—cut along, sonny," said Tamponi, much too anxious to discuss the situation with his friends to care what became of the boy. The latter sped out through the swing-doors on to the side-walk, just as a hansom had pulled up at the kerb in response to Tasker'shail. Hoathley was already taking his seat while the clerk lingered a moment to give the cabman his directions. "Paddington to catch the ten-thirty, and drive like the devil," reached the straining ears of the young detective, and then Tasker seated himself beside his companion, and they were driven rapidly away. But no Zambra emerged from the restaurant in pursuit.

The "Kid" looked after the cab and made up his mind instantly. "No need to follow, seeing that I know where they are gone," he said to himself. "I don't like to quit this till I have found out what Mr. Zambra is up to. That talk about 'cracked heads' and 'locked doors' sounded ugly. However, I can't go in again for a minute or two after the excuse I made, so I suppose I had better run round and tell Dickson. It's a nuisance, because perhaps he won't let me come back."

He started at a run for the office, but had not gone far when he spied Neil Fergusson patrolling on the other side of the street. In a couple of seconds he had crossed over and plucked the big Scotchman by the sleeve; in twenty more he had told his tale and persuaded Fergusson to go and report what had happened to Dickson.

"But if the governor is in any sort of a fix in there we ought to go and tell the police and get them to enter," said Fergusson, turning back when he had gone a few paces.

"I wouldn't care to be the one to do it," replied the "Kid" with much conviction. "You know what Mr. Zambra is. He may be playing possum in there, as right as ninepence all the time, and a nice row there'd be if we had the shop raided and gave the job away. He'd sack the lot of us. I don't believe even Dickson will take that responsibility—unless he is sure there is real danger to the boss. It's just that I mean to find out."

"You're going back, then?" said the tall ex-guardsman, looking down at the little whipper-snapper figure with stolid admiration. "Well, more power to the pluck in your small body, Kid. You can lay odds I shan't be far away in case of need. And see here," he added, "that bounder was whispering about a locked door, you say. If they have taken away the key perhaps these will come in useful," and he handed over the bunch of skeleton keys which he carried in his capacity of mechanic to the office. Then he hurried away to apprise Dickson of latest developments.

To give colour to his pretext for a temporary absence the boy allowed another five minutes to elapse before returning to the restaurant, and then, before re-entering, he looked the house carefully over from the opposite side of the street. He noted that the window of the room over the bar was lighted up, and from the position of the door he had seen opened at the head of the stairs, he gathered that this must be the apartment where the dinner had been served.

No shadows flitted across the curtains, nor was there any sign of life discernible. The other windows on the first floor were dark, these probably belonging to private rooms not in request that night. There were lights in some of the windows on the higher floors, but these, he conjectured rightly, were in the occupation of the Signor's family. He felt sure that in the room at the top of the stairs, if he could penetrate to it, would be found the reason for Zambra's non-appearance.

Having finished his reconnaissance he cleared his face of all traces of excitement, and crept into the bar again with the "hope-I-don't-intrude" air natural to his assumed character. This time his advent caused no surprise, for the one or two new-comers, who had arrived in the interval, were quickly told by the others why he was there, and he returned to his corner seat with no more recognition from Tamponi than a friendly but distrait nod. The Signor was engaged in confidential talk with Big Harry and one or two other hawk-like "captains of industry" who had joined the group.

Kindly pass Short Stories on to your best girl.

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The problem with which the "Kid's" brain was busy was, how to get on to the next floor, but though he was close to the foot of the stairs, he was as effectually barred from them as if he had been a hundred miles away. During the last quarter of an hour the bar had been filling up with recruits from the music-halls and theatres, and the extra waiter who had come on for the supper traffic, was busy preparing the restaurant for the late guests. The crowd, in noisy conclave at the counter, overlapped the approach to the stairs, and Tamponi and his cronies were at the end of the bar nearest to them. The boy's original intention had been to attempt to slip up unseen but that was now out of the question.

Suddenly a sparkle, instantly repressed, shot from his eyes, and he rose and fidgeted up and down the bar, as though tired of waiting for his fictitious father. This, as he intended, had the effect of drawing renewed attention to him, and soon several of the customers spoke to him, most of them desirous of "standing treat" to "Waring's youngster." After allowing himself to be pressed, he at length shyly accepted some lemonade, at the expense of some admirers of the absent actor, and having once began to thaw, he set himself to amuse his entertainers with boyish chatter. Then he waxed youthfully curious, and began to put questions.

"What is that funny thing in the corner?" he asked after a while, pointing to the end of the bar where he had been sitting.

"That's a plate-lift, sonny," someone said, "an arrangement for running the dishes and things up on to the next floor for use in the private rooms."

"I see," said the "Kid," with deep interest. "Why, it's almost big enough to take me."

"Oh, no; you could never cram in there," replied his informant, carelessly.

"I'm not so sure of that," chimed in one of the bystanders, a member of the *Yeller-Feller* staff. "I believe the young 'un would pack himself away in it right enough."

"Bet you a sovereign he can't," retorted the other.

"Done with you," snapped the journalist, to the "Kid's" great joy, justifying the expectation that in such company a difference of opinion was likely to result in a wager. "Here, come along, youngster," added the taker of the bet; "we'll soon see who gets the thick-un."

Feigning some reluctance, the boy was conducted to the lift, which was the usual box, under two feet square, working by pulleys up and down an enclosed wooden shaft. A chair was brought, so that he could more easily reach the level of the lift, and he was already commencing to squeeze himself into the narrow space when Tamponi first noticed what was going on, and Big Harry turned his scowling face in the same direction.

"Hi! you fellows—what are you up to there?" cried the Signor.

"It's only a bet, Tamponi," said one of the speculators. "Gummidge has laid me a pound the youngster can get into the lift. We shan't hurt the confounded thing."

The "Kid" did not know that on the proprietor's assent depended the last chance of life for a girl in a lonely house forty miles away. It was anxiety for his master that made his heart stand still as he waited for it, then beat high when it came: "All right; but you Johnnies pay if you break, you know."

Permission being thus granted, the boy resumed his efforts, and, as he very well knew he would from the first, succeeded in cramping himself into the lift. The loser paid over the amount of the bet, and went away in disgust, leaving the winner and his companions to celebrate the victory. The "Kid" made no move to leave his strategical position, but in the artless manner of a boy who has whetted his appetite for skylarking, evinced a desire for more.

(To be continued next week.)

"INDIGESTION

was sapping my strength, stiffening my joints, and making an old man of me long before my time," says Mr. Alfred Barnes, of Albert Road, Keynsham, nr. Bristol. "However, it is clean gone now, and its departure dates from the time I commenced taking

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Short Stories That . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, June 17th. Postcards only, please. The prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Miss W. Turner, of Blundell House, Kensington, W., whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

FUDDY: "Really, now, I suppose the average amateur fisherman is the prince of liars." Duddy: "Perhaps so; but what about the man with his first baby?"

"THE last thing I sent to this paper," said Melancholis, "was accepted immediately." "What!" cried Scribe in astonishment, "what was it?" "A cheque for an annual subscription."

"MRS. MACPOWERS, don't be after pokin' yer tongue out at me, but act loike a lady for wunst an' come outside the door for a moment an' Oi'll make the ugly face o' you loike the map o' Ireland."

'I WONDER," said the man of a statistical turn, "I wonder how much powder is destroyed daily in useless salutes." "There must be a lot," said the frivolous girl. "But I suppose women will go on kissing one another just the same."

"I HAVE come to ask for your daughter's hand, Mr. Herrick," said young Waller, nervously. "Oh, well, you can't have it," said Herrick. "I'm not doling out my daughter on the instalment system. When you feel that you can support the whole girl you may call again."

BOBBY (who has been sitting patiently half an hour): "Mr. Boomer, I wish you would pop the question to Bella." Bella: "Robert, you naughty boy, what possessed you to make such a preposterous remark?" Bobby (sulkily): "Well, anyway, ma said if he did you'd jump at the chance, and I want to see you jump."

* AT Exeter Hall, London, a converted negro from West Africa was shown a collection of photographs. "What is this?" he asked, gazing with a look of wonder on one of them. "That is a snapshot taken during a scrimmage at a Rugby football match." "But has your church no missionaries to send among these people?"

"THE WHITE MAN WHO SCALPS HIMSELF."—This was the name the Indians gave Belzy Dodd, a hunter and trapper, who so awed the savages that he could travel alone across the plains in safety. The act by which he did this is described in "The Old Santa Fé Trail." Belzy Dodd's head was as bald as a billiard-ball, and he wore a wig. One day, at Bent's Fort, there being many Indians about, Belzy decided to have a bit of fun. He walked round, eyeing the Indians fiercely, then, dashing in among them, and shouting a war-whoop, he pulled off his wig and threw it down at the feet of the Indians. They thought he had jerked off his own scalp. Every one ran like a scared jack-rabbit, and for months not a redskin would go near him.

BAGLEY: "Have you recovered from your recent sickness, Bailey?" Bailey: "No, not fully." Bagley: "Why, you look as well as ever." Bailey: "Yes, but I owe the doctor £13 still!"

MERCHANT: "No, Flasherby, I am afraid your boy is not quite suitable. He has not got a—hum—a large enough understanding for our business." Flasherby: "Not large enough? Bedad, sor, he's got the biggest feet of any boy in the city, begorra!"

WIFIE: "What's the matter, Charlie?" Hubbie: "I've lost my collar button." Wifie: "Where did you lose it?" Hubbie (trying to be sweet): "Now, don't ask me that, dear; don't you suppose if I knew where I'd lost it, I'd go there and find it?"

"GENTLEMEN," said the member from North South Blankshire, "you twit me with having turned my coat. Years ago I supported this measure. Then I had a reason. But now, gentlemen, I have lost my reason." And he wondered at the deafening smile that pervaded the meeting.

A FRENCH soldier on active service was informed by the Mayor of his village that his father had recently died. In acknowledgment he wrote as follows: "M. le Maire, I heartily thank you for my father's death. It is a little accident that often happens in families. As for myself, I am in the hospital minus one leg, with which I have the honour to salute you."

THE MOTHER: "I want you to keep that young man at a distance, Jennie. If you don't he'll be proposing to you." The Daughter: "He has almost as good as proposed already." The Mother: "How is that?" The Daughter: "He said you would make a lovely mother-in-law." The Mother: "He did? Well, perhaps you had better accept him. You might do worse."

JENKINS (walking up the front garden): "What on earth——" (reads "No Admittance Except on Business") "What on earth, Mr. Parker, have you got that stuck on your front door for?" Parker: "Why, so many ornamental fellows call on my daughters that they are in one another's way, and as the girls don't go off I must do something to reduce the surplus! Coming in? No? Well, ta ta!"

SCEPTICAL PATIENT (to faith doctor): "How do you propose to cure this pain in my chest, doctor?" Faith Doctor: "I shall pass my hands over your chest a few times, then tell you the pain is gone, and it will be gone." Patient: "Ah, yes. Will you dine with me, doctor? You can perform the cure afterwards." Doctor: "With pleasure!" Patient: "Well, take this loaf of bread and rub it on your waistcoat a few times and say you have had your dinner, and you will have had it. If the experiment is a success we will go on with the chest cure."

THE other day a lady of large proportions and evident opinions upon the subject of woman's rights, entered a tram-car which was already crowded with city gentlemen busily reading their morning papers. "Are there no gentlemen here?" she inquired, holding on to the strap, and gazing scornfully around. No one spoke. Every head buried itself more deeply in the newspaper before it. At last, one mild-looking man quietly rose, and said, "Gentlemen, I am willing to be one of four to rise and allow this lady to sit down." That settled it, for the lady indignantly flounced out of the car and tranquillity was again restored.

"The Golden Dwarf" begins the week after next.

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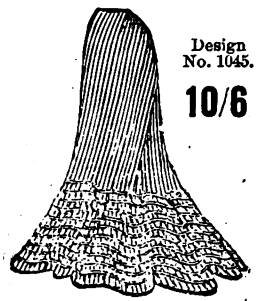

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Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 37 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1½ stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 28lb., and I am cured." Mrs. Darnley-Smith, of Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, says: "Tablets have reduced me very much." Mrs. Crossley, of Rose Hill, Torver, Coniston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

FOR the past few hours, dear reader, I have been intensely miserable. It has been all through a dream. Now, I am not a believer in dreams. That is to say, I do not think they have any significance for good or ill in the future. But this dream was an especially depressing one. Let me tell you what it was.

I dreamt that I dwelt, not in marble halls, but in my ordinary editorial office, and that the day for the publication of the first chapters of "The Golden Dwarf" had arrived. With the knowledge of this fact, it suddenly rushed upon my mind that I had made no announcement of this great epoch-making event in *Short Stories*. The thought stayed my heart almost, and chilled my blood. What would my readers think (my dream ran), to have this novel before them without their having been given a chance to tell their dearest friends, and thus allow them to share in the great privilege of perusing it? My heart beat slower and slower, my blood grew chillier and chillier. I verily believe it would have become a sort of many-branched red icicle in another minute, but fortunately I woke up. Relieved to find it was all a dream (the result of overwork, probably), I was still haunted by a vague fear that it might be true. And so, at the earliest possible moment, I referred to last week's number and the one previous to that. Therein I found that after all,

"THE GOLDEN DWARF"

had not gone unannounced. Whereupon my spirits began to revive. When the new serial starts, viz., 25th June, I can promise you that your spirits (be they ever so low now) will revive, too.

❦❦❦

A YOUNG and giddy correspondent, who is evidently a good judge, sends me the following:

The way to make "Not Enough" out of "Enough" is to take the third letter and place it first; then the second letter is placed in rotation, while the first letter is made to follow; the sixth letter should be placed fourth, the fourth letter fifth, and the fifth letter sixth. That makes "One Hug," which, my correspondent says, is "Not Enough" for any girl.

❦❦❦

"TENTERDEN" wants to know why it is that professional men live longer than others.

There are many good reasons for this. In the first place, the struggle for existence begins later in professional life than in other careers. The professional man seldom begins his work much before twenty-five, while the business man or labourer goes to work at the age of sixteen. Thus the professional man has seven clear years of freedom from responsibility, moderate work, and healthy existence.

Secondly, the occupation of the professional man generally takes him to a considerable extent into the open air, and is very seldom entirely sedentary. Thirdly, the professional man generally enjoys that modest competence which saves him at once on the one hand from starvation or penury, and on the other hand from idleness and excess. Fourthly, his holidays are generally ample.

Fifthly, to a certain extent his livelihood generally depends on his leading at least a comparatively sober and moral life, violent excesses ruining both his standing and his business capacity. Sixthly, professional callings are exposed to very few special dangers. Lastly, since even a minor ailment often unfits a man entirely for professional work, he has a special motive in taking particular care of his health.

❦❦❦

YES, you are quite right, "Mamma." By the law of France it is forbidden to give infants under one year any form of solid food, unless such be ordered by a written prescription from a qualified medical man. Nursing-bottles provided with rubber tubes are also forbidden.

❦❦❦

A CORRESPONDENT sends me the following interesting communication:

This is a true story: On a rough winter night, a young man was going up to Dundee to spend Christmas with his friends. The journey had been a long one, and when the train stopped at the platform where tickets were taken before arriving at Dundee, the young fellow opened the window and put out his head to get a breath of fresh air. In a moment his hat was blown off, and sent scudding along the platform.

"Shall I have time to get it," he said to the ticket collector, "before the train goes on?"

"If you look sharp," was the answer.

He jumped out of the carriage and ran after his hat. But the chase was a long one, and he had to go nearly to the end of the platform before he recovered his property. Then he turned and ran back, but before he had gone many yards, to his unspeakable indignation, the guard blew his whistle, and the train moved off.

He was furious as he saw the end lights of the guard's van growing smaller and smaller in the distance. Then they suddenly disappeared altogether.

The Tay Bridge had collapsed!

❦❦❦

"TIMBUCTOO."—In Persia, the tears of mourners are bottled up, as in the olden times. Each mourner is provided by the master of the ceremonies with a wad of cotton-wool, with which he wipes away his tears. This cotton is afterwards squeezed into a bottle, and the tears are preserved as a powerful remedy in extreme cases of sickness and a charm against evil influences.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I AM open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 4,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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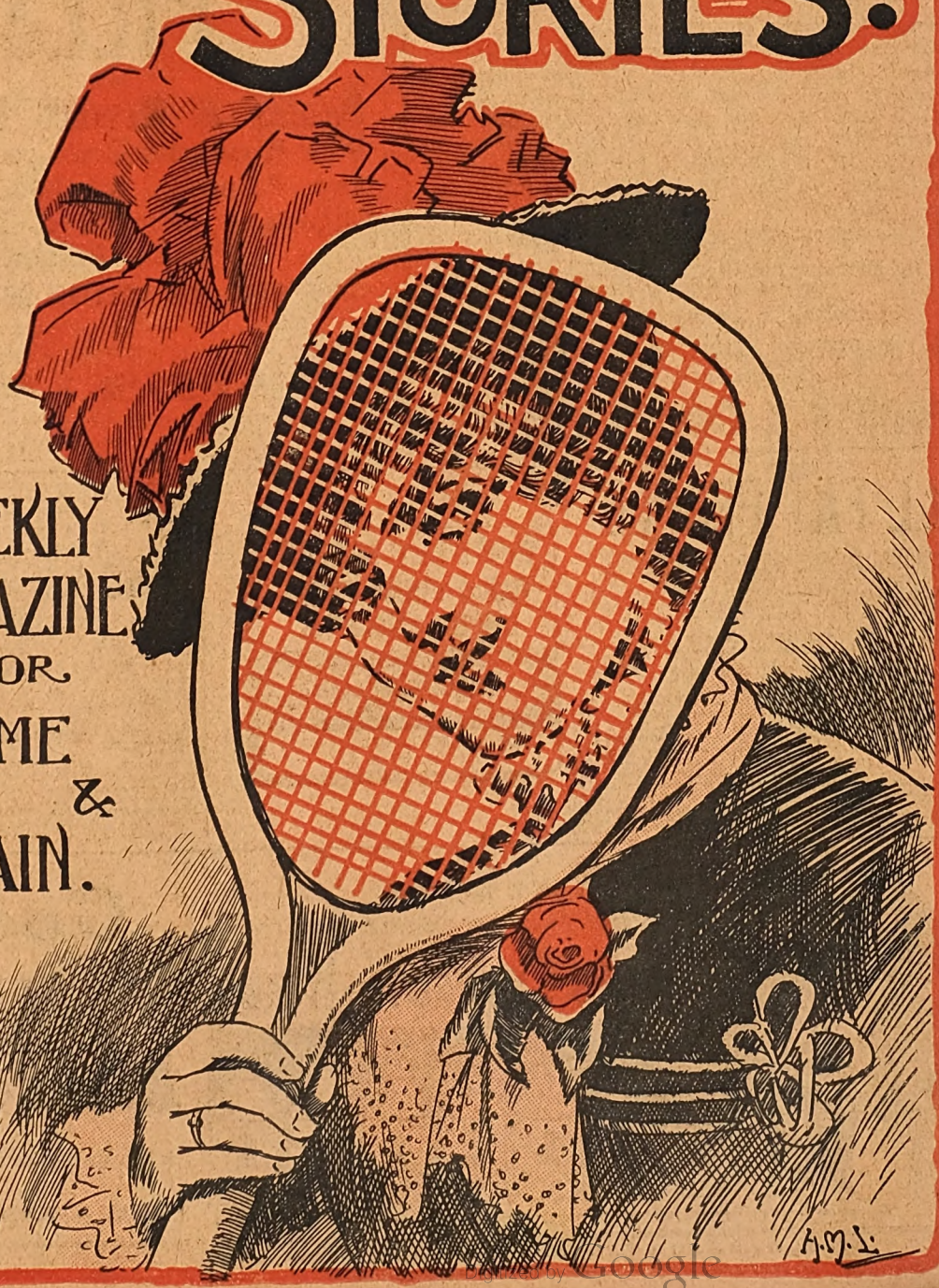

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SHORT STORIES

No. 651.] For the Week Ending June 22nd, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

THE GIFT OF THE GODS.

"Now then, Mrs. Heyes, how are we to-day? Is the tea ready? I am just dying for mine! Oh! I beg your pardon. You have a visitor, I see. Don't let me interrupt you."

The speaker, a good-looking man of about thirty, would have withdrawn at once, had not Old Margit eagerly called to him to come in.

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THE GIFT OF THE GODS.

- By Mrs. GEORGE CORBETT. -

CHAPTER I.

I MEET MY FATE.

I STAND at my bedroom window, and look wistfully out upon the scene below, wondering why my life should be so much greyer than that of my cousin Millie, who, I tell myself, has no more right to be petted and indulged than I have. There is to be a bicycle picnic this afternoon, to which I have been looking forward all the week, and it is only within the last half hour that I have become aware of the disappointment in store for me.

Millie and I are orphans, the only children of two sisters, and we have both been very well provided for under our grandfather's will.

To his surviving daughter, Aunt Hagar, to wit, he has bequeathed half his property absolutely, with power to will it as she pleases at her own death.

The other half is divided equally between my cousin and myself. But as we are both minors, we are placed under the guardianship of Aunt Hagar until we come of age. So far, things are equal between us. But it is soon impressed upon me that I must not expect to share my aunt's favour in an equal degree.

I have been told that beauty is the gift of the gods, and I have often wondered why the gods should have been so niggardly with me, when they had so many of their favours to bestow upon Millie. Aunt Hagar openly laments my ugliness, and she just as openly accentuates the difference between her two nieces, by providing all sorts of beautiful clothes for Millie, while I have fain to be content with garments which I know perfectly well to be cruelly unbecoming.

"There is some pleasure in dressing you prettily, my darling!" I once heard her say to Millie, "for you can be made to look like a perfect fairy. But it is only waste of time and money to take pains with Lady Mary Ann, for she grows plainer every day."

Lady Mary Ann!

Lest anyone imagines that I am entitled to put a handle to my name, let me promptly disillusion them. My name is simply another of my trials. Perhaps my father and mother did not mind being called Miggs. But I mind it, and I shall never be able to forgive them for tacking "Mary Ann" on to it.

Mary Ann Miggs! Was there ever such a conjunction?

The nickname did not displease me until Aunt Hagar and Millie got hold of it, and tacked it on to the obnoxious "Mary Ann." The joke must have proved immensely amusing to them, for they never dream of calling me anything else but "Lady Mary Ann," and as I peer through the back of my muslin curtains I hear it spoken by two or three people.

"Where is Lady Mary Ann?" inquires Aline Darcy, giving a final look to her machine, to see that everything is in order before she starts on her twenty mile spin.

"Yes," chimes in Edgar Courtney. "I understood she was going with us. Hurry up, Miss Vernon, and tell her that we cannot wait if she doesn't come quickly."

"There is no need to wait," replies Millie's high-pitched treble. "Lady Mary Ann is not coming with us."

"What a nuisance!" grumbles Courtenay, and for the first time in my life I feel grateful to him. We have practically grown up together. But his behaviour towards me seems to have been always marked by studied indifference, and now he is actually showing himself disappointed at my failure to join the picnic party!

"Yes, it is a nuisance," he repeats. "I don't mind saying that Lady Mary Ann is the best rider I know. She isn't afraid of doing a bit of scorching, and I quite counted upon having an exciting run with her while everybody else was jogging along with decorous caution."

"Really!" sneers Millie. "It is quite interesting, I am sure! Why, it was only yesterday that I heard you make fun of that hideous nose of hers."

There is a moment's pause, during which my heart thumps furiously, and I almost feel as if I could kill Millie for having thus maliciously destroyed my dawning belief in Edgar Courtney's liking for me.

Mind I have no desire to win Edgar Courtney's love, for I am quite sure that in no case would he realize my ideal of a lover. But I do so hunger for a little real friendship. And surely Millie has no need to begrudge it to me, for she has enough and to spare.

"Now I do call that too bad of you," retorts Edgar. "It was you who made fun of her nose, and I only said that I thought it was an awful pity she couldn't change it for a new one, because she would really be a very handsome woman then. But why is she not coming with us?"

"Oh, I don't know," was the petulant reply. "She's changed her mind, I suppose. You never know how to take crotc' etty people like her. There, now we are all ready, I think."

There are a few false starts, and then a merry departure is made. A dozen bicycle bells ring vigorously for a few minutes, and I am left alone, with the bitter thoughts which are by no means toned down by the last injustice of which Millie has been guilty towards me. I don't know that ever I anticipated an outing of any sort with such pleasure as I anticipated this bicycle picnic, and I am sure that there is no earthly reason why Aunt Hagar should have forbidden me to go out this afternoon.

There are visitors coming, she says, and she requires my assistance in entertaining them. But I know perfectly well that when the visitors arrive (if, indeed, they are really expected) my presence will be quietly ignored, and if I venture to join in a conversation I shall be favoured with sundry icy glances which I have no difficulty in understanding as a silent injunction to hold my tongue.

Read the next footline backwards.

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Yet Millie has deliberately led her companions to believe that caprice on my part is the sole reason for my absence from the picnic, and that my temper is so variable and uncertain that it is not pleasant to approach me.

"Oh, there you are," my aunt says, looking at me with grim disapproval in her face. "I suppose you thought you would take your time before you condescended to come downstairs to me.

"You know very well that the Derekthornes are coming here this afternoon, and that Lady Derekthorne is passionately fond of strawberries. You know also that our strawberries are finer than anybody else's. But as you are not considerate enough to offer to gather a few of them, I am compelled to *ask* you to do so."

It does not take me very long to gather a basketful of the delicious berries, for we have a large quantity, and they are of unusual size and quality.

When my task is finished, I look admiringly at the fruit, and then a daring resolve comes to me.

"I have a good mind to pay Aunt Hagar off for being so ill-natured," I tell myself. "It is nothing but spite which has made her spoil my afternoon for me, and I don't think I owe her the slightest consideration. Neither do I care to exert myself for that horrid Lady Derekthorpe and her sister-in-law, who do nothing but talk scandal all the time they are here. Fancy me having to give up the lovely ride to Carisvale in order to spend the afternoon in such company! I don't think I will do it! In fact I won't!"

Having made this momentous resolve, I straightway begin to act up on it by lifting up the basket of strawberries, and taking them into the arbour to await my return.

Then I avail myself of the shelter which is afforded me by the lilac shrubbery, and slip round the offside of it to the toolhouse, wherein Millie and I store our bicycles.

I have just time to my escape without being seen. But I know very well that my aunt will not allow another minute to elapse before she sends someone to recall me to a sense of my supposed duty. So I fasten on my hat as I am running down to the toolhouse, and I postpone the buttoning-on of my gaiters until I have made my escape.

The road upon which I travel is in an opposite direction to that which has been taken by the picnic party. But it is just as good a cycling road, and it does not take me long to reach the cottage of poor, old, bedridden Mrs. Heyes, whom it always does me good to come to see, for in spite of her many afflictions, she has a spirit which persists in looking smilingly upon all the world.

"Well, now, I do call this kind!" she says, the tears of gratitude actually shining in her still, pretty grey eyes. "To think that anybody should take the trouble to come five miles with a basket of strawberries for a poor, useless, old thing like me!"

"There is one thing," I reply heartily. "Nobody could possibly do too much for you, for you deserve whatever you get, and a good deal more. But there is nothing very kind in bringing you a few strawberries, considering what a lot we have in the garden. And as for the journey, why, five miles is nothing on a bicycle."

"That is just what Dr. Denham says," observes Mrs. Heyes, or, as she prefers to be called, "Old Margit." "He comes over here reg'lar to inquire after me, and I do believe he is going to cure my rheumatism, for the stuff he brings me does it such a wonderful lot of good."

"Dr. Denham?" I inquire curiously. "Who is he? I didn't know there was a doctor of that name in the neighbourhood."

"Neither there is. At least, not a reg'lar doctor. He is staying near Holbeck Sands with some friends, and he talks of leaving the neighbourhood before long. Something happened to his bicycle one day when he was passing here, and it had to be mended somehow. One of the indiarubber wheels wouldn't work at all, because it had gone flat instead of being round, so he asked Sarah for a pail and some water."

"How often does he come?" I ask, feeling considerable interest in a man who can be thus practically grateful for a little service rendered to him.

"Every day, miss," I am told. "Indeed, it isn't far off his time now, and I should like you to see him, if you will only stay a bit longer."

While Old Margit and I have been talking, Sarah, her orphaned granddaughter, has been preparing tea, and as everything here is scrupulously clean, it has struck me that it will be rather pleasant to share the meal with them. But the suggestion that I shall stay a little longer simply for the purpose of making the acquaintance of the good-natured doctor, is quite enough to stimulate my pride, and I am just protesting that I must go home at once, when the tinkling of a bicycle bell is heard, and a cheery voice at the door exclaims:

"Now then, Mrs. Heyes, how are we to-day? Is the tea ready? I am just dying for mine! Oh! I beg your pardon. You have a visitor, I see. Don't let me interrupt you."

The speaker, a good-looking man of about thirty, would have withdrawn at once, had not Old Margit eagerly called to him to come in.

"Tea is just about ready," she says, "and you'll find it nicer than usual, Doctor, for there are some beautiful strawberries to eat, and a pretty young lady to talk to."

"That is pleasant information," he says cheerily. "I am fond of strawberries, and I shall be very glad of a nice young lady to talk to. So I hope your friend doesn't mean to run away directly I get here."

Although I know very well that this man with the handsome presence and deep, rich voice, cannot possibly admit any claims to beauty on my part I note resentfully that he does not echo Old Margit's opinion that I am pretty, but substitutes the much more milder term "nice," which can be applied equally well to a good-natured scarecrow or a custard.

"But I won't feed his vanity by letting him think that he is of sufficien importance to scare me away," I tell myself. "And if he finds my nose too severe an ordeal to contemplate, *he* can go off."

But, somehow, more amicable thoughts soon prevail, and very much to my own astonishment I presently find myself chatting away with as much ease and merriment as though Dr. Denham and I had been friends for months.

"Thank you very kindly, miss," says Old Margit when I at last rise to leave. "I hope we shall be seeing you again soon."

"Yes," I answered promptly, "I will come on Monday

Keew txen snigeb frawd nedlog eht.

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or Tuesday if I can, and bring you a few more strawberries to make up for those I have eaten myself."

As I say this, I glance swiftly at the Doctor's face to see whether he feels interested in the arrangement or not, and I feel the soft colour rising to my cheeks again at sight of the unmistakable pleasure which my new acquaintance is showing.

"What a lucky thing!" he exclaims cordially." I want to consult you about something very particular, and I shall be here both on Monday and Tuesday! So if you arrive before me, please do me the favour of remaining until I come."

"How important!" I laugh. "Just fancy having business to consult *me* about, when you have only known me about an hour. I am afraid I must venture to doubt that statement, for nobody ever does consult me about business, not even the people who have known me all their lives."

"That is where the difference comes in," he retorts. "A new acquaintance may have a much truer eye to business than the people who have watched you grow up, and who imagine you to be still a child."

Still a child.

Aunt Hagar still thinks me a child, I know, and although Millie and I are of the same age, my cousin imagines me to be years her inferior in wisdom. Indeed, it has never struck me until this moment that I have a right to consider myself grown-up. But now that the idea has once been put into my head, it is never likely to leave it again, and even now there is a certain little god called Cupid, who, unknown to myself, is helping me to cross the border which divides childhood and womanhood, and is transforming the whole world for me.

It was a wilful childish creature who played truant with a basket of strawberries intended for Aunt Hagar's use. But it is quite a womanly person who returns to Brookside somewhat later in the day.

It takes me much longer to ride home than it did to reach Old Margit's cottage. But Dr. Denham is to blame for that, for he insists upon seeing me safely to the outskirts of our village, although I know very well that there is not the slightest necessity for him to do anything of the sort. Yet I like his presence all the same, and there are so many objects of interest to look at by the way, that the time passes all too quickly.

"Good-bye, Doctor."

"Good-bye, Miss ——. Well, it is odd, isn't it, that I have never heard your name yet?"

Dr. Denham is evidently expecting me to remove his ignorance concerning my actual identity. But instead of doing so I send my pedals spinning round with augmented speed, and am soon riding boldly up the carriage drive to Brookside, in full view of my indignant aunt, who positively glares at me through the middle pane of the drawing-room window.

CHAPTER II.

An Unrepentant Sinner.

I knew very well that I should get a tremendous scolding. But I had yet to learn the full length of vituperation to which my aunt could go, and it is lucky for my self-respect that I know that more than half the things she says about me are rank falsehoods.

I really think Aunt Hagar was never so much astonished in all her life as she is at my merriment, which refuses to be controlled, although I do my best to keep it in subjection.

"You wicked girl!" she exclaims. "You have insulted me, and made me look ridiculous in the eyes of my most important friends. And now, instead of feeling sorry for what you have done, you actually dare to laugh in my face! But I will have a full account of to-day's doings. Did you gather the strawberries I sent you for?"

"Yes, auntie," I answered sweetly.

"What have you done with them?"

"I have eaten them."

"What! A whole basketful?"

"No, only part of them. My friends ate the rest."

"And who are these friends of yours?"

"Very nice people indeed."

"I think I shall be the best judge of that. What are their names?"

"Oh! It doesn't matter about their names, auntie. They are my friends and you cannot possibly feel the least bit of interest in them."

This certainly is open rebellion, and I am quite astonished at my own daring.

Aunt Hagar tries threats and entreaties in turn. But neither of them move me from the position which I have taken up.

While the warfare is still pending, Millie returns from the picnic, with her face still radiant with enjoyment.

"I have had such a beautiful time, auntie!" she exclaims. "The Singletons had ordered a splendid tea, and we have arranged for another ride on Tuesday. But what is the matter? Has that horrid girl been doing something to vex you again?"

"Something to vex me, my darling!" cries Aunt Hagar tragically. "If it were mere vexation, I could endure it! But the ungrateful creature is doing her best to drive me distracted."

"Hateful thing!" responds Millie, casting a venomous look at me, which I return with one of lofty scorn, as I pass out of the apartment with all the dignity I can muster, while I tell myself that I do not care the least bit for their ill-nature.

I am intending to pass the evening in my own room. But this programme does not meet with Aunt Hagar's approval, and dinner is no sooner over than she finds me as much mending to do as would suffice for three or four afternoons.

Millie is allowed to amuse herself with a book, or some music, or in any way she likes. But then, you see, she has been a good girl. She has been to Carisvale in the company of a lot of nice people, with the full consent and knowledge of her guardian, while I have been playing truant in the company of people who must, say my relatives, be very disreputable beings indeed, since I dare not even mention their names.

Seeing how unavailing are either taunts or threats, Millie, whose curiosity has been aroused, tries to satisfy it by worming herself into my confidence.

It is Saturday night, and Aunt Hagar has fallen asleep in her armchair. There is, therefore, an opportunity for a little hypocritical pretence on Millie's part, so she slides her chair a little closer up to mine, and whispers amiably:

"I am not surprised, dear, that you were vexed at being kept in this afternoon, for it must have been a horrid disappointment to you. I tried all I could to persuade Auntie to let you come with us. But she said

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that she wanted you particularly, and Edgar Courtney called her a detestable old cat when I told him how awkward she had been."

"Yes," I respond, whispering quite as sweetly as Millie herself is doing. "I happened to be at my bedroom window as you were going away, and I heard you tell him. I also heard you reprove him for calling my nose hideous."

As I say this I look smilingly into the treacherous face beside me, and I have the satisfaction of seeing that even Millie Vernon's effrontery is not proof against the veiled challenge of her truthfulness. Her face actually reddened with confusion, and she bites her lips angrily, ere she recovers sufficient presence of mind to try and deceive me again.

Nor do I pay the slightest heed to the angry recalling voice behind me.

"But that was just when we were starting," she says. "It was afterwards that I explained everything to him, and he will very probably ask Aunt Hagar himself to let you come with us on Tuesday."

"Thank you," I retort scornfully, not caring whether my aunt hears me or not. "I have no desire to go with you on Tuesday. I daresay I shall be able to survive, even if I have to do without bicycle picnics for the rest of my days."

"You are cross because you have not been enjoying yourself, so I will forgive you any little injustice towards me. I hope you have not had any unpleasant experiences to-day besides those you have had at home."

"Oh, no!" I respond coolly. "My experiences have been very pleasant indeed."

"You might tell me whom you have been to see!"

"I never said that I had been to see anybody."

"But you have seen someone, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes; lots of people! I saw Farmer Ingledew going away from the 'Barley Mow' as I passed, and he looked as if he had been staying there longer than was good for him, for he wobbled about awfully."

"Lady Mary Ann, you are a perfect idiot! And I have no patience to talk any longer to you."

As Millie says this, she jumps to her feet in a violent temper, and Aunt Hagar's nap comes to an abrupt close at the same moment.

If I am not actually an idiot, there must really be something unusual the matter with me this evening, for I don't feel the least bit vexed at the compliments which are showered upon me. I have discovered a great thing. I have hitherto been too meek and yielding, and the bitter tears which have often been forced from me by gross injustice and ill-nature have only been giving more encouragement for petty tyranny.

If, on the other hand, I can but maintain my studied attitude of scornful indifference, my tormentors will become tired of tormenting me, and their ill-nature will recoil on their own heads.

Aunt Hagar sits bolt upright in her chair, and inquires plaintively what that dreadful girl has been doing now.

"There are two dreadful girls in the room," is my cool response.

"Which of them do you mean?"

Now if Miss Hagar Winterson had been gifted with justice or discrimination, it surely would not be difficult for her to answer my last question, for Millie fairly screams with spiteful rage, and, snatching up Aunt Hagar's prayer-book, she would have hit my head with it if I had not cleverly dodged it.

"You see," I continued airily, "she really is in a dreadful state. You had better give her something to cure her."

Then, feeling that I have been victorious all along the line, I leave my two amiable relatives to consult with each other as to the best means of reducing me to proper subjection again.

When I get back to my own room, it seems to me that the only wise plan to adopt is to go to bed at once, although I know that in all probability Aunt Hagar will send for me in a few minutes' time to go back to the drawing-room to do penance for wickedness. So I locked my bedroom door to keep out all intruders and firmly refused to open it when it is rapped at in about twelve minutes.

The next morning is Sunday, and my aunt, sending

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word that she does not feel well, has breakfast in her own room.

"It's your fault," says Millie vindictively, as she appropriates the muffin which I have had toasted for my own special benefit. "She's thoroughly upset by the disgraceful way you behaved yesterday, and if she has a serious illness you will have to answer for it."

"That won't trouble me," I replied airily. "I only hope the illness will be serious enough to make her remain in her room and that you will be compelled to keep her company."

Of course, I should be very sorry indeed if my aunt were really ill. But I see that it is to my advantage to continue my present line of conduct, and Millie is so astonished that she has not the courage to utter any more impertinences to me.

The sense of victory has an exhilarating effect upon me, for I enjoy my breakfast immensely, and I eat bread and butter to my boiled egg as heartily as I should have eaten the misappropriated muffin.

While I am in church I do try to feel more amiable towards my relatives, and I am partially successful until I get home again, and find Aunt Hagar ready with another lecture for me, however. I manage to curb my own temper, and do the best thing I can do under the circumstances.

I quit my aunt's presence, and leave her to talk to thin air if she likes. Had it been a week-day, she would have contrived to fill my time with work. Being Sunday she is not able to do this, and it is possible that she is trusting to the softening effect of my own meditations.

The arbour, which I have already mentioned, is a very favourite resort of mine, especially on calm sunny afternoons like the present, and I quietly make my way thither, hoping that Aunt Hagar will believe me to be still in my own room, for I want to think, and I don't want to have my thoughts disturbed.

I spent quite an hour in this peaceful solitude, and I carry out my intentions to the letter, for I am thinking busily all the time, and mostly of Dr. Denham.

I am still thinking of him when I hear footsteps approaching, and two well-known voices tell me that my present conduct is being discussed rather disparagingly.

"I have a good mind to repudiate all control over her," is the plaintive utterance of Aunt Hagar. "It is too bad that I should be saddled with the care of a girl who doesn't know how to treat me with common gratitude."

"I certainly would do so if I were you," urges my affectionate cousin Millie. "Why don't you send her away at once!"

"Because I know my duty, if she doesn't," answers my guardian. "And although I see nothing but trouble before me, I will go through with my task to the bitter end."

Perhaps, in this connection, it may be just as well to mention that until I am of age my aunt draws the whole of my income, and that my departure from her roof will make a difference of five hundred a year to her. It will, therefore, be easily understood why she is willing to martyrise herself by pursuing her guardianship "to the bitter end."

There is a slight pause, and as the speakers have come to a halt close to the arbour in which I am sitting, I don't need to strain my ears to catch every word they say, for nothing but a tangle of trailing honeysuckle separates us from each other, and hides us from each other's view.

Presently Millie returns to the attack.

"Do you know," she says slowly, "Lady Mary Ann has made some new acquaintances? I am quite sure of it, for she is far too stupid to have acted like she did yesterday, without having been put up to it."

"But whom can she have met?"

"That I do not know. But I can tell that it is someone whom she likes very well, and that she means to go and see them again on Tuesday."

"How have you discovered that?"

"Easily. You know how anxious she has always been to intrude herself upon us every time my friends and I have arranged a bicycle picnic? Yet when I asked her yesterday to go with us on Tuesday, she insolently informed me that she would be very sorry to go. Of course this change of conduct on her part can have only one meaning. She intends to go somewhere else on Tuesday, and if you don't want her to trample your authority under foot altogether, I should advise you to do something that will prevent her carrying out her intention."

"I say, Aunt Hagar!" I call out, purposely pitching my voice as if I were speaking to someone twelve yards away. "Don't you take Millie Vernon's advice, or she will lead you into mischief."

Both Aunt Hagar and Millie gave a startled jump, for they had not imagined me to be within hearing, and as I deliberately pass them on my way to the house, I cannot help smiling at their confusion.

CHAPTER III.

EQUAL TO THE EMERGENCY.

THE rest of Sunday, the whole of Monday, and part of Tuesday pass by in a similar manner to those already recorded, and I am looking forward with great glee to the prospect of my afternoon's excursion to Millington.

Of course I have said nothing about my projected visit either to my aunt or to my cousin, for I know quite well that as soon as ever they learn of my acquaintanceship with Dr. Denham, they will make it their business to prejudice him against me, and I have no intention to afford them an opportunity of doing so. Neither has my aunt given any sign that she knows that I mean to go out this afternoon. Such a possibility has not been alluded to except by Millie, who, knowing full well what my answer will be, has inquired politely if I would not care to join the bicycle party.

"It is not too late to alter your mind yet," she says. "You have cleaned your bicycle beautifully, and it looks quite a picture."

As she has foreseen, I elect to stay behind. But she has infused such an air of sincerity into her invitation that I cannot be anything but polite in my refusal, and the casual observer would have imagined her and me to be on mutually affectionate terms, as we bid each other good afternoon.

"Have you finished marking those pillow slips?" inquires Aunt Hagar.

"Yes, auntie," I reply. "I will fetch them down. Is there nothing else you would like me to do for you? Shall I mark that dozen of new towels?"

I have only half-an-hour at the outside before I start for Millington, and I know very well that I cannot

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mark a dozen towels in that time. But I can easily finish my task after I get home, and it is very amusing to see the look of relief on Aunt Hagar's face, as she hands me the work which she imagines will keep me indoors for the whole of the day.

But as soon as I reach my own quarters I pitch the towels on to my bed with scant ceremony, and hastily prepare for my intended excursion.

The basket and its contents are still where I put them. But a very casual glance tells me that something has happened to my bicycle since I finished cleaning it, just before lunch, for the back tyre is as flat as a pancake, and it will have to be mended before it can be mounted again.

Now I left that tyre positively rigid, and I know quite well that it cannot have become deflated without help. It is also quite easy for me to guess who is the author of the mischief, and I can understand now why Millie was so amiable a while ago.

She has wilfully punctured my tyre. And she thinks that she has effectually prevented me from making any surreptitious excursions this afternoon. Millie has herself had two punctures since she bought her machine, and she has had to send for a man from the bicycle shop to repair the damage. Very likely she thinks that I am as helpless as she is.

But I know too much about punctures to let this frustrate my plans. Having patched my tyre, I say, "Bravo! Mollie. You have circumvented them this time, my girl." exultantly to myself while I am using the pump with a verve which shows how strong and vigorous I am.

But I keep on pumping for a long time without any material effect, until it at last dawns upon me that the puncture I have repaired is not the only one I have to deal with, for I find that there are at least half-a-dozen more.

When I am reduced to my last patch my anxiety has become so painful that I believe I shall scream with rage if I am foiled again.

Hurrah! Things seem to be going all right this time! And when, after more than an hour's patient labour, I screw the valve-cover on, my elation is as great as my anxiety has been, for the tyre is as hard as nails, and my malicious cousin is outwitted after all.

But stay, am I certain of this? Or do I hear Aunt Hagar's voice telling Evans to fetch her a wrap, so that she can come into the garden for a stroll.

"And ask Miss Miggs to come downstairs at once," she concludes, so I know that I have only a couple of minutes' grace before I am discovered, and I forthwith make frantic haste with my task, for I want to slip out through the back-garden gate before my aunt and her wrath descend upon me.

"Lady Mary Ann," calls out my Aunt. "What are you doing here? Why are you not at work in your room?"

"Because," I reply, with outward calmness, though my heart is going pit-a-pat all the time, "because I do not want to be in my room working, and because I see no necessity for doing it, so long as I have plenty of money to keep myself without working."

"Well, if this isn't disgraceful! Lady Mary Ann, I do believe you are g ing mad!"

"And I believe you are quite right, Aunt Hagar! I have been awfully mad this last hour and more, ever since I discovered that your niece Millie had deliberately punctured my back tyre in six places, and you can tell her from me that if ever she dares to touch my machine again, I will smash hers into a thousand pieces."

"You atrocious girl! How dare you say such wicked things? Go back to your room this minute, and stay there until you are in a better frame of mind."

I calmly continue my walk in the direction of the gate. It is so evidently my intention to be disobedient that my adversary can no longer blind herself to the fact, and she darts forward, having determined to intercept me.

She is, however, just too late, for before she can reach me I have opened the gate, swung on to my machine, and have at last fairly started on the ride which has been so exasperatingly delayed.

Nor do I pay the slightest heed to the angry recalling voice behind me, but speed on my way with all the more ardour, because of the many hindrances which I have successfully surmounted.

CHAPTER IV.

Maliciously Misunderstood.

I do not pay much attention to the villagers whom I meet by the way, but I have plenty of interest to spare for a cyclist whom I meet after I have ridden another mile. I recognise him at once as the good-natured doctor, over whose virtues Old Margit is so enthusiastic.

Just for a moment some of Aunt Hagar's restrictions on matters of etiquette recur frowningly to my memory, and I wonder if it is quite proper for me to acknowledge an acquaintanceship which has begun so unceremoniously.

But Dr. Denham himself has no doubts on this score, for he comes up to me as if we were old friends, and greets me with a solicitous freedom from restraint which is very soothing to a girl whose daily life is one round of harshness and fault-finding.

"So you have come at last!" he exclaims. "I begun to be afraid that I should not see you to-day, and I felt immensely relieved when I spied you in the distance."

The doctor's frank manner dispels any inclination to stiffness on my part, and I showed myself as unaffectedly pleased at the meeting as he is.

"Old Margit has been expecting you for an hour or more," he remarks. "But singular to relate, she does not even seem to know your name. She just speaks of you as 'The pretty young lady from Crayburn,' and she tells me wonderful tales of your kindness towards her."

"Old Margit," I replied hastily, "is a dear old soul, who has the pleasant knack of magnifying any little favour done to her, and I really do not deserve all the praise she gives me. But I think I shall have to make the pacing, doctor, or we shall never reach Millington before dark."

I notice that my companion seems inclined to ride very slowly now, and I am anxious to put off as long as possible that declaration of my identity, which I always find so humiliating. But, although the doctor makes no objection to a quicker pace, he does not intend his curiosity to be baulked, and within a few minutes he observes:

"That is a lovely machine you have got Miss ——? Now, really, what do you call yourself?"

"Well, since you must know," I reply, preparing myself to submit to the inevitable smile of amusement which always appears on the faces of people when first

Read the next footline backwards.

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they hear my ridiculous name. "I call myself Molly."

"And a very pretty name, too. Nothing could be nicer. But, of course, there is a sequel to it?"

"Oh, yes, there's a sequel to it. And the sequel is Miggs! Molly Miggs! Miss Miggs! There, now, don't you feel much impressed by it?"

I feel very angry as I ask this question, for although I have hoped that the handsome doctor would be different to other people, the fatal smile appears on his face, just as it has always done on others, and I verily believe that I should use my riding whip rather viciously upon my unfortunate steed if I were riding a horse instead of a bicycle. As it is, I relieve my feelings by some furious pedalling, and for a few minutes I fairly seem to fly along the road. But my companion's speed is quite equal to mine, and as soon as I begin to slow down again, I am greeted by the laughing remark:

"Look here, young lady, it is no use trying to run away from me, for I have a very important protest to make. Your name doesn't fit you at all, and I don't intend to call you Miss Miggs. You look more like a young princess than a Miggs, so I shall cut the Gordian knot by calling you 'Molly!'"

"Oh! but you mustn't do that! It would be far too familiar, for this is only the second time we have met. Besides, nobody ever calls me Molly, except myself."

"Why, what do your people call you?"

"My people? I have no people, except an aunt and a cousin, and they invariably address me as 'Lady Mary Ann.'"

"Then I have the honour of talking to a titled lady?"

"I am sorry to contradict you. But I can only lay claim to 'Mary Ann.'"

The doctor's manner is altogether so kind and brotherly, that it really pleases me to let him have his own way, and by the time we reach Old Margit's cottage a casual observer would have supposed us to be friends of long standing.

As on Saturday we eat our share of the strawberries which I have brought for Old Margit and Sarah, and this circumstance seems to demand the promise of another visit from me.

The minutes seem fairly to fly. Yet I am not at all sorry when the time for departure comes, for I know quite well that I shall have a pleasant escort. I know also, though no words have been exchanged to that effect, that neither he nor I intend to take the nearest route to Brookside, for we are both very particular to see that our lamps are in perfect order.

Within a mile of the village I insist upon bidding Dr. Denham good-night.

"It has been very difficult for me to get out to-day," I say, "and there will be no end of a storm when I get home, for I don't think I have ever been out so late before, except in company with Aunt Hagar. But things will be a great deal worse if it is suspected that I have not been alone, and as I don't want to be prevented from coming out altogether, I will say good-night now."

"Good-night, Molly," is the reply. "I would not for the world augment your troubles. But there is no reason why I should not follow at a reasonable distance until you are nearly at home again, and you must not forget to come to Old Margit's on Thursday, for I really have immensely important business with you."

"You said that before," I laugh, "and then you talk nothing but frivolity, after all."

I expect to go through a tolerably severe ordeal when I get home. Nor are my expectations at all disappointed. Aunt Hagar was furious when I left her, and her fury is now all the greater because she has had to bottle it up for five mortal hours.

She is so violent, so unjust, and so untruthful, that my heart hardens into instant rebellion again, and her accusations are so out of proportion to my delinquencies, that instead of being humiliated to the dust by them as she intends me to be, they fill me with nothing but lofty scorn.

Millie has been at home two hours, and she makes full use of the occasion by uttering mean insinuations which have, however, quite lost their power to sting, for I am in such a state of exultation that I am practically impervious to them.

I do not wait to argue, but go up to my own room, and although it is so late, I don't go to bed until I have conscientiously marked all the towels which were given to me to do this afternoon.

CHAPTER V.

The Dawn of Happiness.

Three or four days pass by, and I am so jealously watched that it has been utterly impossible for me to pay an afternoon visit to Millington. But the time has not been uneventful, for the Fates seem to be conspiring against me, and whether I do a thing or whether I leave it undone it is all the same; I am continually in hot water from morning till night.

I rise in good time, resolved to do all in my power to soften the harshness of the atmosphere in which I live, and I use every effort to show that I am anxious to be on good terms with my relatives if they will only treat me fairly. But all my good intentions are wasted, and now that Aunt Hagar has once got it into her head that there is something wrong with mine, she is constantly making discoveries, which she and Millie twist in confirmation of this terrible theory.

"There is nothing mad about me," I tell myself, "but there soon will be, if this wrangling and mischief-making continue much longer. I did not believe it possible that anybody could be so blindly unjust as Aunt Hagar is to me, and I cannot conceive why Millie should cherish such furious anger against me."

It transpires afterwards that jealousy has something to answer for in this connection, and that greed is also playing some queer tricks with my cousin's imagination. I have no means at present of knowing that she has had

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a look at my grandfather's will, and that she has found out that if the old gentleman had died one month sooner than he did, he would not have written the codicil in which he divided between her and me the money which was originally intended to go to her alone.

My mother had the misfortune to displease her father by her marriage, which was certainly not a very judicious one, and it has struck Millie that if her grandfather had not repented of the harshness which he had maintained up to a few weeks before his death, she would have had the money which is mine now, as well as that which she already enjoys.

It is a fact, therefore, that she resents my very existence. But I am unaware of this as I wonder why she hates me so, and I think no girl was ever more thoroughly miserable than I am until I again find an opportunity of making my escape from Brookside.

To use my bicycle is out of the question, for Aunt Hagar has locked it in her dressing-room, and she has informed me that it will remain there until I comport myself entirely in harmony with her wishes. There is small hope of my being able to do this as long as all my words and actions are wilfully misconstrued, so I resolve to be independent of the bicycle and watch for a chance of going out unobserved.

All I need is ten minutes start to enable me to get clear of the village, and my opportunity comes in due course.

The gardener, who works for us three days a week, forgets to lock the back gate when he goes out, and while my relatives are engaged in the drawing-room with some visitors, I am speeding as fast as I can on foot towards Millington, wondering the while what important changes have been taking place since I was last there. In reality, only a few days have intervened. But it seems a long time to me, and I feel relieved from a fear of I know not what, when a turn in the road shows me a figure which is spinning right merrily towards me on a bicycle, and which I recognise as that of Dr. Denham.

"I had made up my mind that something had happened to you," he says, and my heart positively leaps with joy when I see the genuine gladness which shines in his face at sight of me. "I have haunted this road ever since I last saw you, and I really meant to brave the lion in his den and make inquiries for you, if you didn't turn up this afternoon. But why are you not on your machine?"

"Because," I reply gaily, feeling that the bliss of the present moment is worth all the unhappiness I have been enduring of late, "because my steed is locked in his stable, and I am not allowed to use him."

> "Her father he has locked the door,
> Her mother keeps the key,
> But nothing in this world shall part
> My own true love from me!"

sings my companion, in a rich, sonorous voice, and even while the scarlet flush comes to my cheeks, I feel myself irresistibly carried away by the natural buoyancy of my spirits, and I join with ebullient abandon in the refrain of the time-worn glee, which has suddenly acquired for me such a joyous meaning, as it never has had before.

"And now, little one," says the doctor soberly, "just tell me all your troubles. I don't want to be intrusive, but it is often pleasant to have a sympathiser, and I would give the world to make your life happy."

Dr. Denham and I are so thoroughly congenial that it seems to be quite natural for our friendship to progress rapidly, but I cannot help feeling a little startled, for the tone which he has now adopted is not merely that of a friend, but of a lover, and the joy which this conviction brings to me is turned momentarily into keen pain by the fear that my idol may only be playing with me.

But I have only to look into his handsome face again to be convinced that he is the soul of honour, and it is truly so comforting to have someone to whom I can tell my sorrows that I am soon pouring forth the tale of my recent experiences.

But the tenour of one or two of the doctor's subsequent remarks serve to show me that he is making a very curious mistake concerning me. I have made no allusion to my fortune, and he has taken it into his head that I am a penniless dependent upon the bounty of the aunt who is so unkind towards me. Swift as thought there comes to me the reflection that the surest test of severity which I can exact from my new friend is to allow him to believe that I am really as poor as he supposes me to be, and I withhold the little item of information which will help to assure me that if this man is really learning to love me, his love for me must be as pure and unselfish as the love for him which has so suddenly sprung up in my own heart.

All the time we have been talking, we have been continuing on our way to Old Margit's, he wheeling his machine with one hand, while I feel so happy and elated that the distance we travel seems all too short for me.

"I cannot bear to part from you," he says tenderly, "or I would say that it will tire you too much to walk all the way to Old Margit's cottage."

"Pray, don't think of that!" I protest. "You don't know how strong I am, and I feel just now as if I could walk twenty miles."

"With me for your companion?"

"Of course. It would be too far to go alone, wouldn't it?"

"Indeed it would. Molly, my darling, do you think you could go all through life in company with me?"

But this question, though I would fain answer it in the affirmative, suddenly brings me face to face with what has always been one of my greatest troubles. For one moment my blood pulses through my veins with delirious joy, and then I turn cold and pale with the conviction that such happiness as is here foreshadowed cannot be intended for me.

"How can it be possible," I ask myself, "that anybody can overlook my unfortunate disfigurement to such an extent as to actually fall in love with me?" And the doubt clamours so persistently for utterance, that it shapes itself into words.

"You cannot," I stammer, feeling greater pity for myself than ever I have done in my life before. "You cannot like me enough for that. You forget how ugly I am!"

"My darling," is the enthusiastic response, "to me you are almost perfection. Your figure is positively queenly, your hair, your complexion, and everything else about you is beautiful, except——"

"Except my nose!" I interrupt passionately. "Even you cannot say that my nose isn't hideous," and I forthwith burst into tears of bitter humiliation, for it seems to me that all my earthly happiness is

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dependent on the shape of the most prominent feature of my face.

But Dr. Denham proves to be a very good consoler, and he enters into a long discussion concerning our future prospects, wherein it transpires that he is quite a grand individual.

"I didn't suppose my position would interest you before," he concludes triumphantly. "But now that you have promised to become my wife——"

"But I haven't promised!" I interrupt once more.

"But you will promise," he says confidently. "And there is no reason why I should not seal our compact this very moment."

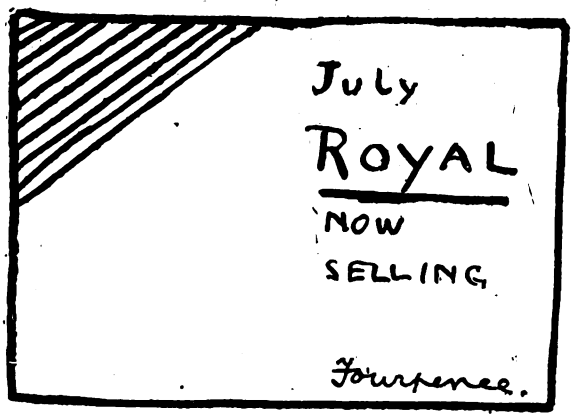
Do I want to utter any further protests?

I hardly know. But if I do, I have no time left to do it in, for a kingly head is bent swiftly down to mine, a warm kiss is impressed upon my lips, and I am informed joyously that I am pledged to become the wife of this man who has captured my heart so easily.

"And now," he continues, "you are not to forget that henceforth you are to treat me with less ceremony than you have hitherto done. My name is Gilbert, and you must call me by no other. You have been 'Molly' to me ever since the happy day on which I first saw you, and I want you to love me enough to be able to treat me as unceremoniously as I treat you."

I do not quite remember my exact answer to this question, but I do remember that Gilbert is greatly delighted with it, and that he insists upon going straight back with me to interview Aunt Hagar. I am rather nervous about the result of this interview. But my nervousness is entirely misplaced, for Gilbert possesses one means of winning my aunt's approval, which I have never suspected. Instead of being a poor, obscure doctor, he turns out to be Sir Gilbert Seymour, who is so wealthy that my own fortune henceforth serves only as a portion of my pin money.

He and I now live very happily together, and if I ever hear tell of the marriage of my cousin Millie, I will let you know about it. But at present there appear to be very slight prospects of such an event coming to pass, for her shrewish temper has alienated all her former admirers. Perhaps this is just as well, for Aunt Hagar and she are such congenial spirits that it would be a pity to part them, and I have heard incidentally that they often boast of being closely related to the handsome Lady Seymour, formerly nicknamed "Lady Mary Ann."



"Perhaps he isn't all he might be, but he stood by me in my hour of trial——" "What was he, an officer of the court?"

Barber: "Your 'air is gettin' rather thin, sir." Victim: "So is that remark." (Deep silence for the rest of the time.)

"Why does she consider her husband a model? He smokes and is fond of liquor?" "Yes." "Plays cards and scolds?" "So they say." "Never gets home until one?" "Yes; but——" "But what?" "He never makes a spot on the table-cloth when he carves."

"You were doing some rather loud talking to-day, Jack." "Well, I only stated facts." "Glad to hear it; when you were saying that you feared nothing that walked your wife was within ten feet of you." "Christopher Columbus! I hope she didn't hear me."

"Why do you scold the butcher?" asked the husband. "It isn't his fault that the meat comes to the table all dried up. Scold the cook." "I don't care to," replied the wife, "but I'm in hopes that if I keep on scolding the butcher he'll get mad and come round and scold the cook."

Stranger: "I was over at your court-house to-day at the murder trial. I don't see why the jury deliberates so long; the prisoner proved a complete *alibi*." Resident: "Wall, I wouldn't like to gamble on the result. This is the first chance for a hangin' since the new gaol's bin built, an' local pride's at stake."

At a café a group of gentlemen were discussing politics; a young student entered and joined in the conversation; his argument did not please the others and one of them said to him: "Be quiet! At your age I was an ass myself!" "You are wonderfully well preserved, sir," was the reply.

When a schoolmaster entered the temple of learning a few mornings ago, he read on the blackboard the touching legend, "Our teacher is a donkey." The pupils expected there would be a combined cyclone and earthquake, but the philosophic pedagogue contented himself with adding the word "driver" to the legend, and opened the school as usual.

One day a clergyman's wife, preparing to give a collation to her husband's association on the following Monday, and not being in the habit of doing extra work on Sunday, told her cook that she would better boil the ham for the sandwiches on Saturday, lest if boiled on Monday it would be too warm to slice. "Why," drawled the cook, "Miss W'ite, yer don't think it ud be wickid ter bile it on Sunday, do yer, ef we biled it slow?"

"Well," said the red-faced man, "the most exciting chase I ever had happened a few years ago in Russia. One night when I was sleighing I discovered, to my intense horror, that I was being followed by a pack of wolves. I fired blindly into the pack, killed one of the brutes, and, to my delight, saw the others devour it. After this, however, they still came on. I kept on repeating the dose, with the same results and each occasion gave me an opportunity to whip up my horses. Finally, there was one wolf left, yet on it came, with its fierce eyes glaring in anticipation of a good supper." "Why, man," said one of the listeners, by your way of reckoning that wolf must have had the rest of the pack inside it." "Ah," said he, "now as I remember it did bulge a bit."

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RECALLED.

A True Story of Venice.

All Venice was aghast at the outrage which had been committed by some unknown, sacrilegious hands; the body of the lovely Leonora, the wife of the powerful Seranzo, who had died from some strange, wasting disease, had been carried off from the mansion where it was lying in state, awaiting interment, and there was not the slightest trace of the robbers or any indication where the body had been taken.

Two hundred years ago, the good people of Venice were not easily startled; their city had from time to time been the scene of such awful deeds that they were wont to take the most extraordinary events as matters of course, but this strange robbery and mysterious spiriting away of a corpse touched them to a surprising degree.

The only person who seemed to be but little moved by the occurrence was Seranzo himself, at first the suspicion of those about him fell upon the husband, but this was dispelled by the hard fact that he could have no motive for such a deed. Their short married life had not been happy, he was even accused of causing her death by harsh treatment, if not by worse means, but in that case he would naturally be more content to see her in her grave.

In a few days the excitement cooled down and other stirring events effaced its memory from the minds of the Venetians. Seranzo joined once more in the gay life of the city and looked about for another partner.

Some thought—that is, those who did not know much about the matter—that Seranzo would seek the hand of Leonora's twin sister, Eliade, who so much resembled his late wife that it was often difficult for persons who only saw them occasionally to distinguish the one from the other. But had these worthy people been present at an interview between Eliade and her brother-in-law on the day following Leonora's death, they would have had all doubts set at rest.

The interview was brief, but stormy. Eliade violently reproached Seranzo for his cruelty, and was answered by the latter with insinuations against Leonora; as Eliade indignantly repudiated the charge, Seranzo took a letter from a drawer and threw it on the table near which she stood.

"Read that!" he cried sneeringly.

Eliade mechanically took up the letter and read it. The few lines of writing contained on that sheet were an impassioned declaration of admiration for her sister's beauty and scornful depreciation of the husband she had chosen. There was nothing in the letter to show that it was in reply to one from Leonora, or to prove in any way the accuracy of the charge; rather was it the

Eliade mechanically took up the letter and read it.

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unprovoked outburst of an unrecognised love, bestowed upon its object while that object was unconscious of having called it into existence. It bore no signature, but on the back were several bars of music which demonstated that the author of the letter was a musician of no mean order. Eliade, who was passionately devoted to music, almost forgot her indignation as her eye ran quickly over the notes; it was so exquisite, this work of the unknown lover, that her very soul was delighted. She was brought back to earth by an exclamation from Seranzo.

"Well?" he asked in the same sneering tone.

"I will keep this," she declared decisively. "It is the best proof I can have of your injustice to my sister!"

She left him without uttering a word more, and she never spoke to him again.

After the disappearance of the body, Eliade set herself the task of discovering whither it had been taken. She was determined to make that task the duty of her life, if need be, and to spare no trouble or expense. She connected the music at the back of the letter with the untoward occurrence, and in her search for the body she also sought for the musician, hoping that the discovery of the latter's identity might assist her in her work.

Several weeks passed without result; all Venice was now interested in the musical compositions of a man whose name was kept secret, but who was generally designated as the "mad musician," for reasons which no one could exactly define.

His compositions were so much above those of other musicians that the opinion was gradually formed that they must be the outcome of supernatural genius. Eliada went several times to hear these pieces in the hope that she might recognise the music on the back of the letter, but in vain.

One evening, musing sadly over her fruitless endeavours, Eliade heard music proceeding from a passing gondola; she listened attentively, and then sprang to her feet with a cry of mingled surprise and joy. She had heard the notes which had haunted her since her sister's death.

In a turmoil of excitement she ordered her gondola to be made ready, and was quickly being rowed in the direction which the other boat had taken. After a few minutes rowing, the gondola was brought within earshot of the music, and Eliade bade her gondolier to row steadily, but not quickly, as she wished to track the singer to his destination.

Alternately singing and playing, the occupant of the foremost gondola proceeded in the direction of a lonely island, scarcely ever visited by the people of Venice because it contained a crypt which was reputed to be haunted.

Eliade decided not to land that evening should the musician do so, but to wait till the following day when she could visit the spot unobserved and make an examination of the island—for what? She could not answer the question, she scarcely knew what she expected to find.

Her gondolier rested on his oars as they dimly discerned the other boat touch the shore of the little island, then the head of the gondola was turned and Eliade went back to her dwelling to wait impatiently for the morrow.

It was noon on the following day when Eliade landed, bidding her gondolier to await her return, and made straight for the crypt despite the uneasy feeling occasioned by a recollection of the popular belief. She entered with no little trepidation, and her heart gave a jump of fear when she found her way barred by the figure of an old woman.

"Why do you come to disturb the spirits of the dead?" asked the woman, staring at Eliade in surprise. A second later she retreated with a look of terror and gasped:

"Come back to life!"

Eliade was quick to grasp the meaning of these words.

"Where is she?" she demanded in a tone of authority.

"In there!" replied the woman, speaking as though under a spell. Then, recovering herself, she continued: "You are not she—she is dead. Who are you?"

"Her twin sister," responded Eliade. "Take me to her. Tell me what it all means."

The woman led the way into the crypt. On a marble block lay the embalmed body of Leonora, radiantly beautiful, like one in a peaceful slumber. Round this chamber were folios of music and three or four musical instruments, some chairs, candlesticks and other indications that it was sometimes occupied by the living as well as the dead. Eliade fell on her knees and wept, but she was not permitted to exhaust her grief; the woman touched her on the shoulder and spoke hurriedly.

"You must not stay here. If he comes, he will be furious. He is mad, he must be, or he could not play such music, he would not play to her. Yes, yes; I will tell you all about it; only come away!"

Eliade had risen and now followed the guardian of the dead to another chamber, or vault, in the crypt.

"He has told me all about it," began the woman. "He loved her, but she did not know it. He wrote to her on her wedding day; he saw her from time to time without revealing himself. When he heard of her death, he was wild with grief; he could not bear the thought; he believed that she was in a trance and would come back to life under his care—he felt that his music would recall her spirit to the motionless body. He had it brought here, where he imagined no one would venture, and he spends most of his time here, composing music.

Read the next footline backwards.

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and playing it to her. I was his nurse and he can trust me. He will be here soon!"

"I must stay and see him! At least," she added, protestingly, as the woman shook her head, "I must watch and listen. You can hide me—you must!"

The old woman might have objected, but she had no time. A soft step made them both cease speaking, and the old woman hurried away to greet the musician. He had not heard their voices; for his mind was full of deeper things.

Eliade remained motionless for two or three minutes, and then ventured to the entrance of the other vault and peered in. A man stood near the marble block, his back turned to her, ready to play.

A moment later the place was filled with melody so grand, so expressive, that Eliade stood transfixed. She knew not how long she remained there, lifted to the skies by the soul-entrancing harmony. Suddenly it ceased, and the man spoke:

"Leonora, come back! No movement! The time is not yet at hand, but it will come. Your spirit cannot withstand the love which finds its expression in music and constant devotion. Come back and be mine!"

He partly turned, and Eliade saw the features of Bendetto Marcello, whose fame as a musician had extended far beyond Venice.

"Marcello!" she murmured under her breath. "And he is the 'mad musician' of whom every one is speaking. One man has earned two reputations! The world will wonder when it learns that Marcello and the mad musician are the same! And this grand music is composed for her! How happy should I be to gain the love which is bestowed on that figure!"

He threw down his instrument, and pressed forward.

A moment later her eyes lit up with a strange expression, and she fled from the crypt. She found the gondolier waiting with evident signs of impatience; in answer to her enquiries, he said he had seen no other gondola, from which she concluded that Marcello had approached the island from the other side and was unaware that his secret had been discovered.

Two days afterwards, a similar scene was being enacted in the crypt, but this time there was no second listener.

The elderly guardian stood where Eliade had listened on the former occasion, and, contrary to her custom, she betrayed signs of nervousness and anxiety. Marcello was pouring out his soul in celestial music, his eyes fixed on the still features of his beloved. It was afternoon; the candles were not lighted, and the faint light from outside illuminated the interior but dimly.

In the midst of his playing the hands of the musician trembled, for his eager days gaze had detected a quiver of the eyelids.

With bated breath he watched the figure that lay before him. Again that quiver of the eyelids, then a long drawn sigh and the eyes opened, fixing themselves with a wondering expression on Marcello.

"Recalled!" he shouted in a paroxysm of joy.

He threw down his instrument and pressed forward to take the hands of Leonora.

"Leonora, you have come back to me!" he cried in ecstacy, assisting her to rise and then kneeling before her in adoration. "Music has wrought a miracle, as I knew it would!"

But now the old nurse pressed forward, so excited

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that she could scarcely stand upright, and, gently withdrawing from Marcello's grasp the hand which he was reverently kissing, led the young woman into the next vault.

Marcello was beside himself with joy. He bestowed every attention upon his beloved, and played his exquisite compositions untiringly for her benefit, being rewarded to the full by her smile and prettily-worded thanks. It was paradise to him to spend his life in pleasing her.

Thus another two days passed, and then the young woman made a confession.

"You call me Leonora; you have bestowed your love on me; what does a name matter? Should I not do the same for you and you for me under any name?"

Marcello looked at her like one who does not comprehend, and does not care to comprehend mere trifles.

"I thought I loved you when your spirit had fled, but only during these two days have I really understood what love really is. What matters it how you are named?"

"I am Eliade. Leonora was my sister. I have taken her place. Is it not better so?"

They remained for a few moments with clasped hands, gazing at each other tenderly.

Gradually a different light, one of comprehension, came into his eyes and he folded her in his arms and kissed her.

The body of Leonora was reverently buried in the crypt, and Marcello returned to the world with his bride, with whom he passed the only happy years of his life. When he died, in 1739, his fame had extended all over Europe, and most musicians of the present day are acquainted with some, at least, of his compositions.

"And do you really think she is so old-fashioned, your Grace?" "Well—weally. Don't you know she has a Roman nose and a Greek profile?"

Jane: "My dear, there is crape on the Dobb's door. Someone must have died." Maud: "Impossible. I'm sure the doctor hasn't been there for weeks."

Clarence: "What are you at now, Willie?" Willie: "Aw, I'm simply a waitah, ye know." Clarence "Howwors! You're surely joking." Willie: "Not at all; I'm waiting for me uncle to die, deah boy. Have a violet?"

"What has become of old Uncle Billy, who used to be always suffering with the rheumatism?" asked the returned wanderer. "Why," said the old resident, "it all came about this way. There was a doctor come through the country and cured the old man." "Yes?" "And then, as he didn't have nothing to interest him no more, after his rheumatism was gone, the poor old man pined away and died."

A small provincial paper, referring to a man who had a reputation for a careless toilet, announced as follows: "Mr. Makeup will wash himself before he assumes the office of parish clerk." On reading this, Makeup was furious, and he demanded a retraction, which the paper made thus: "Mr. Makeup requests us to deny that he will wash himself before he assumes the office of parish clerk."

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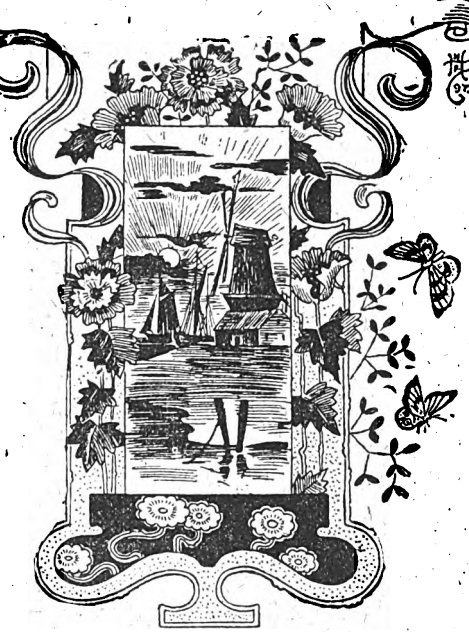
THE STORY OF MARJORY DARE.



THE pinky-white apple-blossom was falling in soft showers upon the pair under the tree in the old orchard.

The girl's head rested upon the broad shoulder of her companion, a tall, well-built young fellow of the working farmer class.

From the tearfulness in her voice as she every now and again responded to his low-whispered words, and from the caressing tenderness of his touch, as his hand lingeringly passed and re-passed over her hair, it was without doubt, a "good-bye" time; an evident "parting of the ways."

Personal descriptions (especially of women) are, as guides to character seldom satisfactory or very helpful, and Marjory Dare was by no means one of that sensationally beautiful type of women that lends itself so readily to word-picturing. Not plain exactly was she, but yet a more than ordinary fair example of the average attractive, healthy English girl. Such an one indeed, as may be met with any day on any country-side.

People said that John Arkwright was unusually love-blind; that Marjorie had another string to her bow.

A faint echo of this rumour had but lately reached him. John, however, with a true man's implicit faith in the woman to whom he had given himself heart and soul, would none of it. Still, the thing rankled a little, do what he might. A vague feeling of uneasiness troubled him now, when, on the eve of departure for Australia, to seek fortune (as he read it) at the fountain-source, he had come to the old trysting-place, not alone to bid farewell, but to assure himself by one more look into Marjorie's eyes that his fears were baseless as they were unworthy.

It must have been her repeated sweet acquiescence that at last appeared to vex him somewhat. It was too cloying, too "sweet i' the mouth."

"Marjorie!" he said, gently disengaging her head from his shoulder, and with his two hands holding her at arms' length. "Marjorie! That artist chap. I hear he's been in the neighbourhood lately."

She looked up quickly, her eyes (and they were her glory—large, dark, speaking almost) seeking in his face the extent of his knowledge.

"Oh! Mr. Beryl!" she at length replied, with a poor attempt at a laugh; then, seeing his surprised annoyance at her manner, "I don't know! I haven't seen him, and—I don't particularly wish to see him that I am aware of."

"I'm glad of that, dear!" said John, with an evident sigh of relief, "Very glad!"

"Why?"

"Oh! Well! he's not the sort of man I want you to know, or to be friends with."

The positiveness of this statement was, on the face of it, injudicious. It implied mastership, and the absolute right to dictate, and this before marriage is nearly always a dangerous experiment.

She drew herself away from his hands, and stood a moment picking to pieces a spray of blossom.

Then:

"I know who is at the bottom of this! Your sister has never liked me! What has Mr. Beryl to do with me, that you should let Ella's wicked insinuations prejudice you against me?"

"Nothing, Marjorie, of course!—I——"

"Then why!" she passionately interrupted him, "why insult me by the mean suggestion? But it is getting late. Good-night!"

"And is that all?" he said, earnestly reproachful. "Remember, I may not see you again for years, perhaps—perhaps—never! Haven't you a kind word, Marjorie, for me to take away with me?"

"It is you alone who are to blame," she replied coldly. "Good-night," and before he could answer, or realize even that she had gone, she had disappeared among the trees in the direction of the house.

* * * * *

It is two years since John Arkwright sailed for the "Underside," and it is on just such an evening as that which saw his parting with Marjorie Dare, and almost

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upon the same spot, that two people are standing in animated converse.

The girl we know, for in spite of change of expression, inclining to the recklessly defiant, she is the same Marjorie as of old.

The man is an artist, evidently; he has the outward and visible mark of the fraternity, which does not always include the inward and the spiritual.

Not bad looking, presumably in good circumstances, and more than a trifle supercilious he is certainly not so much in earnest as is his fair companion.

The tone of cheap and incessant *badinage* which he adopts towards her appears to displease her. Without doubt she wishes to take the matter, whatever it may be, between them seriously, but at every turn is met only with some playful phrase; some mere complimentary nothing.

He holds her hand; holds it so tightly, that, do as she will she cannot withdraw it.

"Mr. Beryl! Let go my hand, please!"

"Since when have you forgotten the name bestowed upon me by my respected god-parents?" he said, quite ignoring her request.

"I do not choose to remember it," replied Marjorie, hotly.

"No? I am unfortunate, Marjorie!"

"Mr. Beryl! You have no right to speak to me like this. It is my friends only who call me by my Christian name."

"And what am I, then?" he queried with a mischievous lifting of his brows. "Am I an enemy? Perhaps I am the Arch for—eh! I verily believe you are angry with me. It is a pity, for it spoils your eyes, my dear, it does indeed!"

Archie Beryl looks at her with an unpleasantly fixed gaze which somehow compels her to lift her eyes to his, by sheer force of fascination.

It is at this moment that Marjorie's father calls her from the house door. Wrenching her hand out of Beryl's grasp, and answering: "I'm coming, dad!" she quickly turns, and leaves the artist to his own reflections.

What follows is matter of County history, inasmuch as the account of it is to be found in the criminal records of ——shire.

Beryl left Farmer Dare's orchard by the stile which led into the home meadow. This he crossed, over to its west corner, where is another stile, separating the field from Brockley Wood.

It was quite dark now, or he would have perceived that he was not alone. As a matter of fact, a tall, broad shouldered man, wearing a dark semi-seafaring suit, and a large felt hat, slouched well down, so as to conceal his features, had from behind a neighbouring tree, both seen and heard all that was said and done at the interview between Marjorie and Beryl beneath the apple-tree.

Step-for-step with the latter, only keeping well in the shadow, moved the other.

At the second stile Beryl paused to light a cigar, and then settled himself down to the walk of about a quarter of a mile through the coppice out into the main road. He was quite familiar with the path, and was by no means fearful of interruption, or danger of any kind.

There is a small rivulet which runs through the wood, and which is spanned at the pathway point by a little wood bridge, a mere couple of planks thrown across without handrail or protection of any sort.

Immediately beyond the bridge, on the side furthest from Dare's farm, the stream widens out into a good sized pool, dangerously deep, and full of holes.

Beryl had crossed this bridge, humming a snatch of popular melody, and had reached terra firma when he heard distinctly, first the sound of rapidly approaching footsteps in the dead leaves on the other side of the stream, and then the heavier, louder tread upon the frail structure itself.

He turned sharply, and was instantly brought face to face with a stranger.

"Mr. Beryl, I believe?" said the latter in deep, constrained tones.

"This is not the place for such an enquiry," answered the other. "If you know me, and it seems that you do, I am to be found at the 'Brockley Arms' in the village. Good-night."

"It is here and now that you will listen to what I have to say," replied the man, reaching out his right arm and gripping Beryl firmly by the collar of his coat; with the movement placing himself directly in the artist's path.

"What do you mean, you scoundrel? Let go!"

"Not 'till I have done," answered the man, increasing the intensity of his grip. "I have sure information that you have on and off during this more than two years trifled with the affections of Marjorie Dare, knowing well that it is out of your power to marry her, you having a wife already. Is it true?"

"I refuse to answer; as my private affairs can be no possible business of yours."

"Is it true?"

"No!"

"Then God forgive you for as monstrous a liar as ever trod earth! Listen. It was quite by chance that a fellow-passenger with me from Sydney should be one Henry Martin, whose only sister you, Archibald Beryl, married four year's since. Do you deny it?"

Now, whether the men had during their altercation moved dangerously near to the bank of the stream; or whether Beryl, in his efforts to free himself from the other's hold, slipped on the greasy mixture of mud and wet grass, will never be satisfactorily explained, for the only man able to solve the mystery is himself in doubt.

Certain it is that when Beryl refused to reply to the questions so fiercely put to him, his accuser was compelled to wrench himself back so as to escape falling into the water.

He was only just in time, for Beryl, beside himself almost with rage and mortification, dealt his opponent a vigorous blow, which only failed in effect by reason of the other's retreating movement.

With a great cry, Beryl lunged forward down the bank into the water, and disappeared.

Hanging over the stream by the aid of a sapling growing out of the bank, and with his face close to the water, the other watched for any signs of Beryl coming to the surface.

Then a lantern-flash on the top of the opposite bank, and he heard voices demanding of him his name and business.

Keepers belonging to the Coombe Court Estate, which included Brockley wood, the newcomer's heard the man's story, and decided to let the local police settle the matter.

"You know me, of course?" said the suspect,

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throwing back his broad felt hat, while one of the keepers held up the lantern to his face.

"Why, it's young Awkwright! Mr. John, I'm main sorry; both of us is, but for our own protection we must ask you to come with us into Brockley."

"Why, certainly! but can nothing more be done to try and find this wretched man's body?"

"Depend upon it it's jammed in a hole. There's nothing for it but to wait till daylight to make a search for it."

* * * * *

John Arkwright, committed to the County Assizes for the wilful murder of Archibald Beryl, in due course stands his trial in Brockley town.

He has admitted that he deliberately planned to follow and accost the artist on the night in question. This admission makes a fatal impression upon the Court, the judge especially pointing out in his address to the jury that the prisoner had every probable motive to commit the crime with which he stood indicted, in that he had himself had love passages with the young woman whose name had been mentioned in the course of the proceedings. Jealousy, therefore, to his (the judge's) mind, furnished the only key to whatever mystery there might be about the affair.

That Archibald Beryl was knowingly a married man did not in any way affect the issue, and it was clear that the quarrel between the two men must, upon the prisoner's own showing, have originated with himself.

The strongly adverse summing-up of the judge led most in court to look upon a verdict of "Guilty" as almost a foregone conclusion. True, the prisoner's counsel, the most eminent of "Old Bailey" pleaders, had commented strongly upon three principal facts.

In the first place he argued that the evidence against his client was wholly circumstantial; secondly, that John Arkwright had frankly told his story, in no way withholding anything, even to his own detriment; and lastly, that during his whole life the prisoner had, not alone by those of his own immediate neighbourhood, but by the whole county, been respected, loved even, as witness the overwhelming testimony of rich and poor, peer and peasant.

When, after the judge's address, the jury declined to leave the box, as being unnecessary, but stood up at once, just whispering together for barely a minute, no one, from his lordship downward, anticipated aught save condemnation.

"Not guilty!"

Courts of justice have many times witnessed enthusiasm, but the occasion of John Arkwright's acquittal may fairly claim a record place in the annals of popular satisfaction at a righteous judgement.

That the presiding dignitary was astounded, dissatisfied, indignant, goes without saying, clearly proving that the greater lights, legal or otherwise, are by no means infallible, or to be always relied upon for their illuminating power.

John Arkwright had heard nothing of Marjorie, save a vague rumour that she was ill, and under the care of her father's sister.

As he stands upon the steps of the Court-house, an hour after his release, he finds himself to be the object and centre of a great demonstration of local feeling.

It was distasteful to him; he wished rather for peace and quietness, not for the noisy congratulations of his fellows, howsoever sincere they might be.

Suddenly his eye and ear are attracted by enhanced movement and sound in the corner of the market-place where the crowd is densest.

Women's voices give the dominant note, and women's voices in evident angry clamour.

Catcallings—shoutings to "Duck her!" "Stone her!" "She ought to stand where Mr. John did!" This, and even worse, reached him where he stood.

Somehow it acted as the one thing to rouse his soul to the reality of return to life.

Rushing down the steps, and cleaving his way through the throng, without regard to the individual, he gained the excited mob of the town women of the baser sort that surrounded a young girl, dishevelled, and with clothes mud-stained and rent, who lay in a dead faint upon the ground.

John knew her! Was she not part of himself, since she had his heart?

"Shame on you!" he cried, kneeling down, and gently lifting Marjorie's head. "You are not women! —Who made you my avengers—and upon her? Shame on you!"

A stone had struck Marjorie perilously near the right temple, a little stream of blood trickling down on to John's hand.

"Could I but know who threw that stone!" he cried, "they should answer for it! Fetch a cart, some of you!"

And so he took her to her home, but it was long before she dared to meet his honest eyes.

Still, the time did come when she sobbed out her repentance upon his breast, and when he in complete absolution closed her lips with his own.

* * * * *

Upon John Arkwright's sheep-run in Australia, Marjorie is gradually learning to be happy, for her husband, keeping a firm hand upon the curtain that shuts out the past, brightens by his love, his care, and his untiring devotion the ever-growing contentment of a beautiful and all-satisfying present.

RALPH ENDERBY.

Read the next footline backwards.

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TALES TOLD OFF DUTY.

IN DEADLY PERIL.

Told by the Steeple-jack.

"YES," said the short, thick-set man, who had been introduced to the company as "Steve Kennedy—a relation o' mine," by Jack Wyatt, the fireman; "I s'pose mine is rather an uncommon sort o' trade. But there's many a worse one, I assure you. A steeple-jack earns good wages, and it's his own fault if, when jobs are scarce, he ain't got money enough put by to tide him over till brisker times come round. Anyway, I know I've never wanted for a few shillings during the time I've followed the trade—pretty near thirty years."

"Rather break-neck work though, I should think," remarked the commissionaire-sergeant.

"That's a matter of opinion," answered the steeple-jack. "For my part I'd sooner climb the highest spire or chimney shaft in the kingdom than cross some o' these London streets o' yours when the traffic's thick. Why, this very afternoon, I stood on the kerbstone about twenty minutes tryin' to pluck up nerve enough to go from one side o' the road to the other, and when I did make a dart for it, I was as near as possible bein' smashed up between a four-wheeled cab and an omnibus. Yes! you may laugh, mates, but it give me a rare fright, it did indeed; and fear's a thing I never felt when workin' on steeple or shaft—except once."

"Only once in thirty years' experience, eh?" observed the commissionaire, who scented a yarn.

"Only once, mate, and that was when I was a young chap of twenty-seven. Though I can't help shudderin' a bit whenever I think o' the affair, I've always been thankful in one way that it happened.

"It come about like this: A gang of us had been engaged for several weeks, repairin' the shaft of some spinning-works, situated a few miles away from a big Lancashire town. These works were known as 'Nicholson's,' and the shaft was one of the loftiest in the whole county.

"Well, one Saturday, me and my mates knocked off about noon, and went to our different lodgings in the village. There were eight of us in the gang, and all except me and Tom Dawson went off by the 1.30 train, to spend Saturday to Monday at Oldham, where most of us had our homes. Dawson and me had agreed to follow by a later train.

"After havin' a bit o' dinner, I was just thinkin' about changin' my togs, when there came a loud knockin' at the front door. I thought at first it was Tom Dawson, who lodged further up the street; but, presently, my landlady comes rushin' into my room, followed by a gal of twenty or thereabouts. The lass hadn't no hat on, her pretty face was as white as a sheet, and she was wringin' her hands and sobbin' as though her heart would break.

"Before I could ask what was the matter, the lass dropped on her knees in front o' me, cryin' out—'Oh! save him—save my father!' Secin' I was puzzled, the landlady beckons me out o' the room, and in about ten words tells me what was wrong.

"The girl's father, Andrew Fuller by name, had climbed up the shaft of Nicholson's Mill, and, to all appearances, fainted. He was lyin' on the narrow platform which ran round the top o' the shaft, and it was feared he would roll over the edge.

"I didn't wait to hear more. Dashin' past the landlady, I ran as hard as I could in the direction o' the Mill. In a few minutes I reached the base of the shaft, near which stood a crowd o' men, women, and children, all gazin' upwards at somethin' which, at that distance, looked little bigger than a hat.

"I went to the tool-hut, slung a coil o' rope over my shoulders, and then started to climb the shaft. I soon reached the top ladder, and, steppin' on to the platform, saw that the man Fuller was still insensible, with his head leanin' against the scaffolding, and one of his arms dangling' over the edge o' the planks. He was a big, powerful-lookin' chap of about fifty, and I saw it would be no child's play to get him safe to earth.

"Just as I was makin' a loop in my rope and thinkin' how best to tackle the job, the man suddenly sprang to his feet and stood glaring at me. Then he commenced to breathe hard and foam at the mouth, and I knew I was face to face with a madman!

"It was a nasty position to be in, and I don't mind ownin' that the awful look in Fuller's eyes almost paralysed me with terror. There we stood for a few moments watching each other, until suddenly the madman gave a shriek, took a pace forward, and shot out his hand towards me, palm outwards.

"I just had time to step backwards, or over the platform I must surely have gone. Angry at my escapin' the push, Fuller came at me again, his eyes blazing and his mouth wide open. Once more, I got out of his way, and then began a chase which, even now, it makes me tremble to think of.

"The madman kept tryin' to push me over, and knowin' it would mean certain death should he spring at me from behind, I had to keep walkin' backwards to escape his outstretched hands. Round and round that narrow platform we went, Fuller's pace—and consequently mine—gettin' faster every moment. He seemed to bear a charmed life, for he had nothin' at all to hold on by, and though his foot slipped more than once over the edge o' the planks, he got his balance again directly.

"Presently he breaks into a sort o' run, and I'd all my work cut out to dodge him. Worst of all, the quick backward movement round and round the shaft was makin' me feel sick and giddy. 'Twas impossible to get on to the ladders, only a yard or so separatin' me from my pursuer. However, I makes a feint to step on to the rungs, and lucky for me I did so. For the thought that there was my only way of escape evidently crossed the lunatic's mind, and down he sits near the top of the ladder, his legs hangin' over the platform.

"Thankful for this chance of getting my breath, I leaned against the scaffolding and tried to think o' what I should do next.

Keew txen snigeb frawd nedlog eht.

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"Should I creep behind Fuller and shove him over the side. No, I couldn't somehow stomach that idea, although 'twas what looked like happenin' to me. Then the thought struck me that perhaps I should have to pass the night up there with him, and I almost shouted with terror.

"But all at once I hears some cheerin' from the crowd below, and lookin' down, I saw that a man had started to climb the shaft.

"Nearer and nearer he came, and soon I recognised him as my mate, Tom Dawson. About six feet from the top he stopped and said to the lunatic:

"'It'll soon be getting dark, old chap; hadn't you better come down off of that?'

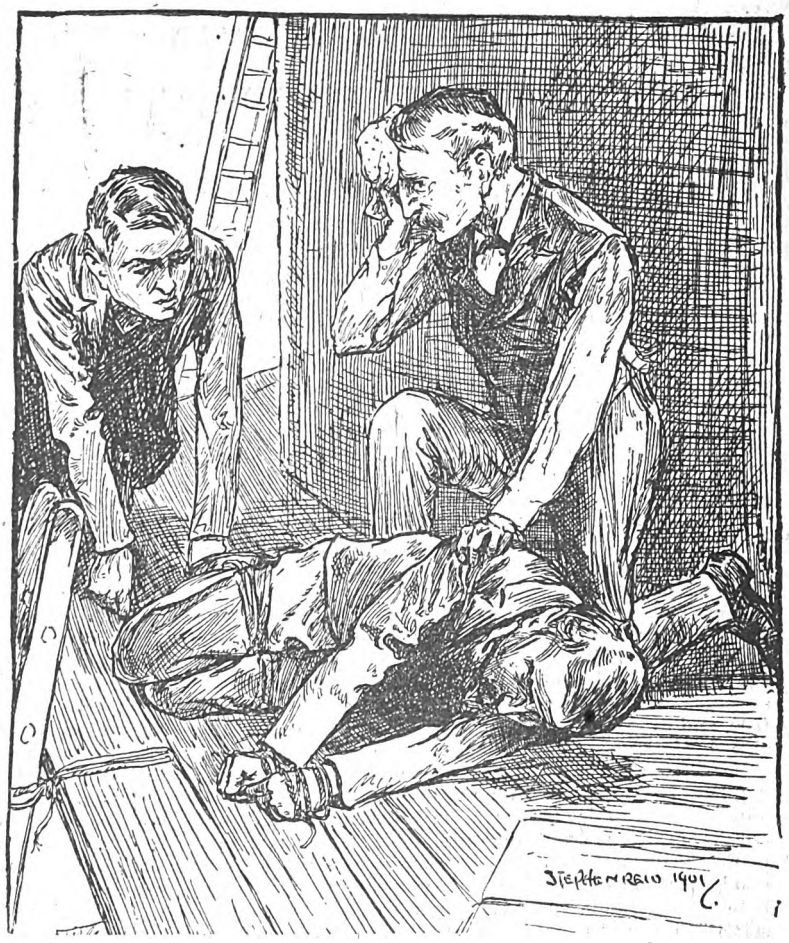
"But Fuller only gibbered, and, clutching the side of the ladder, tried all he knew to wrench it from its fastenings.

"'The man's gone daft wi' fright, Tom,' I shouts. 'Don't come further, or he'll shove you off.'

"Fuller looks at me, grins, rubs his hands together, and turns his eyes on Tom Dawson again. Watchin' my chance, I picks up my coil of rope, makes a noose in it, and, chuckin' it over Fuller's head and shoulders, pulls it taut. Then with a sudden wrench, I jerks him backwards, kneels on his chest, and calls out:

"'Now, Tom, up you come, quick!'

"I'd hardly said it, when Dawson was on the platform helpin' me to bind the madman's limbs. That wasn't an easy matter, for the man shrieked and kicked, and tried his hardest to free himself. But Tom and me knew we were fightin' for our lives, and at last we had him trussed up in such a way that he couldn't budge.



Fuller fainted again.

"Then came the question: how to get him to the ground? If it had been planks or bricks o' the same weight, we should 'a done the job without much trouble; but carryin' down them almost perpendicularly-fixed ladders, a man, who, though bound, might by a sudden jerk cause us to lose our balance, was a very ticklish task.

"Dawson and me were tryin' to think out some plan, when the very best thing that could have happened did happen. Fuller fainted again.

"We didn't attempt to bring him to. We just got hold of him, one at each end, and carefully began to descend the ladders.

"Step by step we went, carrying our senseless burden, and when at last we reached the ground, I dropped down exhausted, while Tom Dawson was in little better plight.

"It was many weeks before Andrew Fuller got his senses back.

"Why had he climbed the shaft? Oh! just for a five-shilling wager. He and some of his cronies had been drinkin' together that Saturday afternoon, and somehow their talk had turned on us steeple-jacks and how risky our work must be. Fuller had laughed at the idea, and said 'twas no more risky than workin' at a cotton-loom! At that, somebody offered to bet a crown Fuller would be afraid to climb the shaft, and Fuller, bein' a bit in his cups, said 'done.'

"Well, he got to the top all right, waved his cap, came over dizzy, and then swooned with fear. When he came to, he was daft; and as he often told me afterwards, remembered nothin' o' having chased me round and round the platform, or of his bein' bound and carried down the ladders by me and Dawson.

"They say it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good," the steeple-jack concluded; "that old proverb came true in this case. How? Well, mates, but for Fuller havin' climbed the mill shaft, I might never have made the acquaintance of his daughter Kate, the prettiest lass in all Lancashire—at any rate that's what she was to my eye. Kate and me have been man and wife now a matter o' twenty-five years, and real good partner she's proved herself to be."

Finest Serial ever written "The Golden Dwarf."

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MY WIFE'S HYPNOTIC EXPERIENCES.

We were discussing hypnotism, a lot of the younger members, at the Cosmopolitan Club the other night, and after any number of opinions had been given on the matter, I turned to old Briggs, who had just come into the smoking-room, and said:

"I say, Briggs, you are a pretty shrewd card; you've seen a little of about everything going. What do you think of hypnotism—is it a fake or not?"

Briggs did not answer for a moment or so; he busied himself lighting his cigar, and then turning slowly round in his chair so as to face our group, he answered:

"I can't tell what to believe about it, for I own frankly I can't make up my mind what it is; but I will tell you of an incident in my life that will at least prove that it is not a fake.

"Most of you youngsters know Mrs. Briggs, and you are perfectly aware that she is not a weak-minded woman, nor an imaginative one, by any means; on the contrary, she is very level-headed, and has quite as much business ability as I have, infinitely more tact, and much keener intuition. I speak of this," he added, "because she was the person chiefly interested in the little story I am about to relate.

"Ten or twelve years ago, just after I had been admitted as junior partner in my father's firm, I went abroad, taking my wife with me. We spent a few days in Boulogne, and then went to Paris, where we knew a good many people, and taking a nice apartment in the hotel—well, never mind the name of our hotel—we settled down to enjoy our holiday as much as possible.

"Maria (Mrs. Briggs) went in, of course, for a round of shopping, dresses and millinery, and all that sort of thing, but above all, she had set her heart on having a *bonâ fide* tip-top French maid. I had never been able to afford her a maid before, but on the strength of my partnership she determined to have one that combined all the qualities that go to make a perfect lady's maid, and she must be French. So she advertised in all the newspapers and through all her friends; and one day, about a fortnight after we arrived in Paris, I came in from a morning stroll to find Maria in a most delightful humour, and the possessor of all that was to be wished in the way of a maid. She (the maid) had letters innumerable from all sorts of fashionables, and her last employer spread herself over four sheets of perfumed coroneted notepaper in such a decidedly overdrawn style, that I thought it looked rather fishy, so I took the precaution of looking her up myself that very afternoon.

"I found her to be a most delightful old lady, living in the finest quarters of Paris, and apparently a great lady herself. She told me the only reason for Melaine leaving her service was that the girl wished to go to England, that she might prosecute a search for a long-lost scamp of a brother, who, she had reason to believe, was in that country.

"I returned perfectly satisfied as to the girl's character, and that night I saw her for the first time as she answered my knock at my wife's door when I called for her to go out to dinner. She was tall, raw-boned woman, sallow skin, black hair, perfect teeth, and a very peculiar pair of eyes. I cannot tell you in what the peculiarity lay—not in the colour, for they were the ordinary black eyes of the bourgeoise class; not in the shape, nor in the expression; but the effect of those eyes upon one at first sight was peculiar, for it was the effect of making one forget that she was a servant, and you found yourself involuntarily treating her with the familiarity of an equal.

"Things ran along in their ordinary routine for a couple of days after Melanie's arrival, until dinner time of the second day. I had just finished my soup, when a servant handed me a wire in the firm's cipher, requesting me to return without delay.

"I shoved the message across to my wife, hastily excused myself, went into the office, and, consulting a Bradshaw, found I could catch a train, and so crossed to Folkestone that night.

"Arrived in London, I took a cab from the station, and rushed into the private office, where I found my father and our other partner, old Jiggs (my father-in-law), sitting with my message before them, awaiting me.

"'What's the matter?' cried my Governor.

"'Where's Maria?' shouted old Jiggs.

"'What do you want of me?' cried I.

"And then we all three stood looking at one another stupidly, waiting each for the other to speak. I took out my note-case, produced their telegram, and handed it over. Jiggs looked at it, and then handed it to my father. He read it over, got out our cipher code, translated it, rang his bell for the correspondence clerk, handed him the message, and awaited an explanation.

"The clerk read it, examined the date of it, and quietly but firmly repudiated it. He then produced his letter-book and showed all his correspondence for that date, and sure enough, my fateful message was not among it. I dismissed the clerk with an intimation not to speak of the matter to anyone, and then my father, partner and self held a consultation.

"The first thing to be done, of course, was to wire to Maria.

"Late that night the despatch was returned by the manager of the hotel, with a message from him saying Madame and maid had left the hotel the same day I had.

"I went straight to Scotland Yard, and told my little tale to the superintendent there.

"He was a very wise man, that superintendent, for he knew enough to hold his tongue and let me tell my

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story out. Then he closed his note-book with a click, and said:

"'Call at your address, sir, between 8. 30 and 9. 30,' and bowed me out.

"At nine o'clock that evening a Scotland Yard man visited me. His report amounted simply to this: My cable message was, of course, simply a plant to get me out of the way; then my wife (probably by means of another forged telegram) had been abducted for the sake of ransom, and was now being held in duress somewhere, until I should advertise a large enough reward for her return—when her abductors would correspond with me. All this, of course, I knew; but I did get one little grain of information from him, and that was that they were sure that Maria and her captors were not in England. I must look for them on the Continent, if anywhere. The detective was very certain of this, and, in fact, so was I.

"After the detective had made his report and left me alone, I lighted a cigar and sat down to think the matter out.

"To begin with, the forged dispatch in our cipher had been sent by confederates in London. How had they got our code? Suddenly, like a flash it came to me; my wife's maid, Melanie, was at the bottom of the whole thing. I was in the habit of carrying a copy of our cipher in my note-case. It was a very short and concise one, and consisted of only some twenty words or so. She had purloined the cipher, copied it, cabled the message to some accomplice in London, and he had cabled it back to me. This was easily enough done, for my bedroom opened into my wife's, in our apartments in Paris; and it was my habit, when I dressed for dinner, to leave my note-case in the pocket of my morning coat, or lying carelessly on mantel or table.

"Melanie, of course, had the run of the rooms. But how had she induced Maria to leave Paris with her, and hope to keep her, in hiding. For Maria was no ordinary woman; she was strong physically as mentally, and since she had more pluck than most men, she was not one to be easily influenced or intimidated. The longer I thought the matter over, the less I understood it; and at last, tired and dispirited, I turned in, resolved to leave London for Paris on the morrow.

"I arrived in Paris on the second day, and went straight to the Hotel ——, where I had left Maria.

"I had an interview with the manager, in which he gave me all the information he could about Maria's departure, which amounted simply to the bare facts that on the morning after I had left, she had sent down for her bill, paid it, and left the hotel in company with her maid, saying nothing to anyone as to where she was going.

"I left the hotel and called on some of our most

"What's the matter?" cried my Governor.
"Where's Maria?" shouted old Jiggs.

intimate friends, but got nothing from them but condolences, and they were of no practical use.

"A strange phase of the affair was that I never for a moment felt anxiety on my wife's account. I felt assured that I should find her very shortly, and I never thought even that she might be subjected to abuse, or anything worse than restraint.

"I had made up my mind by this time not to have anything more to do with detectives. I was going to

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find Maria myself. All I needed was some good muscular fellow, that would stand by me in case there was any resistance offered to my rescuing her when I found her. He must be a Frenchman, as I was not able to speak or understand the language to any extent.

"I returned to the hotel about five o'clock, and found my Hawkshaw there with a French brother-in-arms, awaiting my arrival.

"They bored me with a long report as to theories, and so on, and I smoked and mentally consigned them to the devil.

"After they had left me in peace, promising to report again to-morrow, I dressed, and dined in the hotel restaurant.

"I noticed that my appearance in the dining-room caused a little flutter among the waiters, and the dignified head man conveyed me to the choicest table in the room, and handed me the menu card in a manner at once dignified and sympathetic. They remembered, and of course the 'Affaire Briggs' was the talk of the house. I smiled to myself, and devoted a few minutes to a study of my card.

"As I raised my eyes I met the gaze of a man seated at a table directly opposite.

"He was dining with a companion, another man, who sat facing him, and consequently with his back to me. The eyes that met my own seemed in some way familiar. They were black and very keen, and gazed at once in a very quiet, authoritative manner that made it almost an impertinence to return the gaze.

"Although I had no recollection of having seen the man before, there was something familiar to me about him. He was slight, of medium height, wore a short, pointed moustache and imperial, and in dress and manner was certainly a gentleman.

"I busied myself with my dinner, and yet I could not keep my eyes off the man opposite me. The table he occupied was some little distance from me, but as the two or three tables intervening were unoccupied, I had a clear view of him, and as often as my eyes strayed in his direction they met his, until at last it seemed to me there was a mocking gleam in those black eyes, meant for me.

"Presently the black-eyed man and his friend rose and left the dining-room. I followed them idly with my eyes, and as they passed out of the door my *vis-à-vis*, who was last, turned and (was it imagination?) smiled a very ironical, exasperating smile full in my face.

"'So much for your impertinence in staring strangers out of countenance in a public dining-room,' I thought at first; but no, I had not stared any more than he had. Every time I looked at him he was looking at me. The incident had impressed me, and my mind reverted to it no matter how often I put it by.

"I finished my dinner as slowly as possible, for I was enjoying it, and in fact, did not know what to do with myself afterwards, and presently on ordering coffee and lighting my cigar, I noticed I was alone in the big room, save for the waiters.

"As I noticed this, I also noticed that the man that had been waiting on me had been replaced by another waiter, and the new man seemed to be anxious to speak to me.

"He hovered around after I had paid my bill, and at first I thought he was waiting for a tip, as the tip I had already given him, of course, went to the man whose place he had taken; but when I offered him a ten-sous piece he refused it, and, as he did so, whispered in my ear:

"'Meet me in one hour in front of the Café des Anglais; I have something for you.'

"This he said quickly in English, and then as quickly disappeared.

"My first thought was that it was a plant, but a rendezvous in so public a spot could not be dangerous, and I decided to go.

"I went up to my room, slipped on an overcoat, and started out to keep my appointment.

"As I passed down the grand staircase of the hotel I passed the man I had noticed at dinner coming up. He saw me too, and again his eyes challenged me.

"I turned and looked over my shoulder at him after I had descended a few steps, and found him looking back at me. I felt annoyed at my seeming impertinence and faced quickly away, but not before I saw the same sneering smile I had got at dinner. I passed quickly out on the boulevard, lighted a cigar, looked at my watch, found I had half-an-hour before my rendezvous was due—just time to stroll slowly there.

"The lights inside and outside the Café des Anglais were flooding the walk as I passed it for the first time, without meeting the waiter. I walked a little distance beyond it before retracing my steps.

"As I passed the main entrance the second time, a man stopped me, and said: 'You're Mr. Briggs, are you not?' in perfect English. I hesitated for a moment before answering, and he said: 'You need not fear a plant, sir. I'm taking the place of a friend of mine, who made an appointment to meet you here at this hour. He is unable to be here, and sent me to say to you: "Find out about the sick gentleman in Number Fourteen, Hotel ——." Remember, Number Fourteen.' And before I could speak, the fellow was off. I started to follow him, but he was too quick for me, and soon I lost sight of him.

"Here I confess I was puzzled. What had I to do with any sick gentleman in Number Fourteen or in any other number? But suddenly it struck me Fourteen was the number of the suite I had occupied in the Hotel —— before, and where I had left Maria. That settled it, and from that moment I was determined to find out everything about the sick gentleman. But how? I could go and ask the manager, and he would refer me to the register, where I should find his name (any name he chose to write) and his domicile. I wanted to see the inside of Number Fourteen—see the sick gentleman.

"I thought hard and walked hard, as is my habit, as I came to my decision to see the gentleman in Number Fourteen. I suddenly came to a halt in my walk, and found that I was lost. I do not know Paris very well, and now I found I had wandered into an entirely new part of it to me. I looked about me for a landmark to guide myself by, and as I did so my eyes lighted on a small, brightly polished brass sign, which read in English: 'Private Enquiry Office,' and below, the name Lavalle, 'Ring Number Four.'

"I rang Number Four without a moment's hesitation. The door opened, and an old man in a red nightcap motioned me upstairs. I ascended flight after flight of very steep stairs, until at length, at the top of the last flight, I came face to face with another brass plate on a door, on which was inscribed 'Lavalle.'

Read the next footline backwards.

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"There was a light within. The door opened to my knock, and I found myself face to face with Lavelle himself. He motioned me to a chair and asked me my business. I studied him as I told my story, and when I had finished, was satisfied I had found a man I could depend on. He was of medium height, evidently of great strength and activity, and his clean-shaven face told of determination and pluck. He heard me out to the end, hardly making an interruption, and when I had finished, he said:

"'You are right in one thing, at least, Mr. Briggs. We will find out all about the gentleman in Number Fourteen before we sleep to-night; and now, if you please, we will adjourn to the Hotel ——.'

"He picked up his coat and hat as he spoke, and we made our way to the street, and hailing the first fiacre we met, we were at the hotel just as the clock were striking twelve.

"Lavalle led the way to the office and demanded that his card be taken at once to the manager. That individual appeared at once in answer, and we three were soon closeted in his private room, where I put him in possession of the events of the night. He promised all assistance in his power, and first of all produced the register. There we found that on May 17th, the day after Maria had given up the rooms, Number Fourteen had been assigned to a Mr. Burton, of London, accompanied by a servant, and a Doctor Languedoc, of Vienna, in attendance. Mr. Burton was an invalid, suffering from some intense nervous disorder that necessitated complete quiet; so much so, that none of the hotel servants were allowed inside the rooms. The Doctor had assured the manager that the disease was not in any way infectious, and as their bills were large and promptly met, the manager was loath to have any trouble with so good a patron.

I gazed in silent amazement at the trim, neat woman.

"Lavalle insisted, however, that he should, at least, see Doctor Languedoc. 'I have an idea that I know him, and if it is the man I think, he will not offer much resistance to my inspecting Number Fourteen.'

"After some further discussion, the manager sent a servant to Number Fourteen, asking Doctor Languedoc to step down to the office. Saying, 'I will be back in a moment,' Lavalle followed the servant.

"I sat anxiously awaiting developments. At the expiration of some few minutes the servant returned, looking slightly excited, and said M. Lavalle requested the manager and myself to step up to Number Fourteen.

"We did so, the manager in the lead, and as he knocked at the door, Lavalle's voice bade us enter. We found Lavalle standing in front of the fire, and sitting in an armchair near him was my friend of the restaurant.

"As we entered, Lavalle said:

"'Mr. Briggs, allow me to introduce my friend Doctor Languedoc, *alias* Doctor Robert, *alias* several other names, a gentleman who is an ornament to two professions, medicine and hypnotism. He has a very interesting case in the next room, to which he is about to introduce us. You, Mr. Briggs, may be rather surprised

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when you see the patient; but the Doctor will explain. Now, Doctor, with your permission, we will examine your patient.'

"Languedoc rose, and led the way into the bedroom, followed closely by Lavalle, the manager, and myself The room was furnished in the ordinary French style, the bed curtained, and the curtains drawn. A man sat in a large easy chair, before the fire. He glared at us with no very amiable expression, but said nothing.

"'I may as well tell you again, Doctor,' said Lavalle, 'that my men are guarding every entrance to the hotel.'

"Languedoc merely bowed assent; said:

"'You hear, Jacques,' to the man at the fire, and stepping to the bedside, drew back the curtains.

"I took one look at the face on the pillow, and dearly as I love my wife, shocked and horrified as I was to find the poor girl in such a position, I could hardly restrain my laughter. It was Maria right enough, but Maria as a man—a middle-aged man. Her hair was cut short, and her large features carried out the effect. Her face had taken on the petulant, peevish expression of a middle-aged hypochondriac.

"Lavalle looked at me with an interrogative expression, and I merely nodded. Languedoc dropped the curtains, and we all returned to the outer room, including the Doctor's co-conspirator.

"'And now, Doctor,' Lavalle suggested, 'you will kindly give us the details of this little conspiracy, and we will decide what to do with you?'

"'There is no conspiracy,' Languedoc replied very coolly. 'That gentleman in there is Mr. Burton, an English gentleman under my charge as long as I will him to be. Listen.' And he opened the door into the bedroom, and called, 'Mr. Burton, how do you feel to-night?'

"'Very badly, Doctor, very, very!' came the reply from the bed, unmistakably in Maria's voice. but how changed from her full, rich tone to the querulous one of a hypochondriac.

"'You see,' said Languedoc. 'Now I have a few little terms to make. If they are not agreed to, why, Mr. Burton may remain Mr. Burton as far as I am concerned, and——'

"'Name your terms,' I interrupted. 'For Heaven's sake, let us get this devil's business over!'

"The Doctor smiled amiably at me, and said: 'I am very glad you are inclined to take so sensible a view of the matter, Mr. Briggs. My terms are simply that after I have restored your wife to you, sound in mind and body, you will hand me five thousand francs, and allow me to depart in peace, and in the meantime, my friend, here,' pointing to the other scoundrel, 'be allowed to go at once.'

"'I agree,' I answered. 'Let this fellow,' I said to Lavalle, 'restore my wife to her normal condition, he shall have his freedom and his money.'

"Lavalle bowed assent, and Languedoc said: 'Now, if you will excuse me for one moment, until I make a slight change in my costume, I will return, and then you shall learn all the particulars of this unfortunate affair.'

"He disappeared into a dressing-room, that opened off the sitting-room, and connected the two sleeping chambers of the suite; and in a wonderfully short time reappeared, and to my astonished eyes, in the person and costume of my wife's ex-maid, Melanie. I gazed in silent amazement at the trim, neat woman, as she stood before us, curtseying gracefully to us all, and in a moment the whole clever plot flashed through my brain.

"Of course, Languedoc was Melanie, or Melanie was Languedoc. I was too much surprised for a moment to utter a word; but Lavalle rose, and placing a chair, gravely invited Melanie to be seated.

"She thanked him with a charming smile; and asking our permission first, lighted a cigarette, and proceeded to give us the details of the whole plot, which in short was as follows:

"She had studied medicine at one time, and had taken a great interest in hypnotism, in which science she made great progress, at least, as far as being able to exercise her magnetic power over others went. When she had been at the medical school for a year or so, she met a young student, with whom she fell in love. Together they developed their hypnotic powers, and even practised medicine in Berlin, until the doctors of that city made it too warm for them.

"Then they were forced to turn to some other means of obtaining a living, and it was during this part of her career that Lavalle had known her under the name of Dr. Robert; and in the employ of the regular practitioners of Berlin, he (Lavalle) had been instrumental in ridding the city of two of the most notorious charlatans that ever rooked a confiding public.

"After they had been forced to close their sanitorium (for they had a very large and lucrative one just out of Berlin), the male partner in the firm became engaged in some affair that put him within the reach of the criminal law, and to escape arrest he fled to Paris.

"Melanie, in order to earn money to live on and to eventually join him there, had, through forged letters, obtained a position as maid in the employ of the lady from whom she came to my wife. The scheme of getting me out of the way, and then placing Maria under her influence and carrying her off and holding her for ransom, did not occur to her until after she had an opportunity to inspect my private letters and other memoranda that she found in my note case, which I used to leave carelessly lying around my rooms.

"She made out a cipher message recalling me, cabled it to a friend in London, with instructions to him to cable it back to me.

"I bit, as you know, and the night after my departure she put Maria 'under control,' as she expressed it; and told her that she was an elderly gentleman, an invalid, that her name was Burton, and that she (Melanie) was her medical adviser. Then, of course, as such, she simply willed every thought of Maria's, and she became an automaton, of which Melanie pulled the wires.

"After supplying Maria with the necessary wardrobe, and engaging the services of the nurse (who had been in

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her employ before), Melanie, whose boldness of conception and execution was her strong point, came to the very hotel Maria had just left, and finding the suite No. 14 unoccupied, she engaged it.

"The waiter who gave me the tip was an old employé of Melanie and her lover. He had not been well treated by them and took this way of getting even. As I had left Maria plenty of cash there was no difficulty on the score of funds, and had it not been for Melanie's misfortune in running across that waiter in the restaurant, her 'grand coup,' as she called it, would most likely have been successful.

"I have condensed the story as Melanie told it, but these are the main facts. As she finished her account of the affair, she rose and said:

"'Now, Mr. Briggs, the next thing is to restore Madame to herself and you. I will arrange the rooms exactly as they were before she previously left them; and when I have dressed her as she should be, I will recall her to herself, and put her under the impression that she has been ill, to account in that way for the loss of her hair and the lapse of time. Then I will disappear, and you, Mr. Briggs, can pretend that I stole that five thousand francs and the money I have spent belonging to your wife. You will find Madame's jewels and wardrobe exactly as she left them. I, of course, had to have new canvas covers made for her trunks and dress baskets, but you will find the old covers and labels underneath.'

"Melanie was as good as her word, and in a few minutes had the rooms arranged as they were when we last occupied them, the covers off the luggage; and Maria, clad in her proper garments, was sleeping quietly when Melanie called me into the bedroom to witness the change from Mr. Burton to Mrs. Briggs.

"Lavalle and I stood together at the foot of the bed, the hotel resident physician (who had been summoned and instructed by the manager and myself as to the part he was to play) stood at the right hand of Maria, with his fingers on her pulse. Melanie, in a careless attitude, peaceful and nonchalant, stood at her left. She glanced at me inquiringly. I nodded assent, and she called in a low, clear tone, 'Mrs. Briggs, Mrs. Briggs,' instead of using the more conventional 'Madame' common among French servants.

"Maria opened her eyes slowly, and as they fell on me, she said:

"'Oh, you've got home, have you, John?' And then to the physician: 'Well, Doctor, I feel stronger to-night, I think. I may get up to-morrow, may I not?'

"The Doctor played his part to perfection, and I hastened from the room to hide my emotion; for now that my wife was restored to me, I realised how awful an ordeal of anxiety I had passed through, and how awful an adventure had been hers, although she had not realised it.

"A few minutes later, the Doctor, accompanied by Melanie and Lavalle, came to me.

"'Madame seems to be perfectly rational, monsieur,' said the Doctor. 'Her mind is perfectly clear, and save for slight physical weakness, accounted for by want of fresh air and exercise, and her diet of light food, she is perfectly well. In a week, at the farthest, she will be able to travel. I will look in in the morning,' and saying good-night, he went his way.

"'Now, monsieur,' said Melanie, 'I have restored your wife to you as you left her. You will kindly hand me the money you promised, and I will go.'

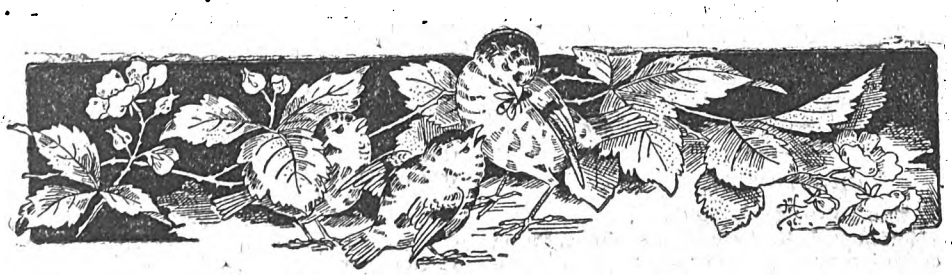
"I had procured the cash in French bank-notes from the manager, and handed them over to her without a word. She took them, slipped them into the bosom of her frock, and left the room. Returning with her bonnet and jacket on, she said:

"'Good-bye, Mr. Briggs. You have treated me as a gentleman, and I will say I am glad that after all my plan miscarried; but oh, gentlemen, think of what a coup it was. I should have had a hundred thousand—yes, two hundred thousand francs. You are very rich, Mr. Briggs—it is nothing to you, and to me it would be wealth; and then how cleverly the whole thing was conceived, and how boldly carried out, only to be spoiled by that pig of a waiter. But I will not cry over spilt milk. Good-bye again, Mr. Briggs. M. Lavalle, I leave at once for America. You will never be bothered by me again. We shall not meet again, Mr. Briggs. *Au revoir!*' And with that stepped gracefully out of the door, and out of my life at the same time.

"I sat talking with Lavalle for an hour or so. I commissioned him to find the man who had given me the tip, and reward him, for I intended to remove my wife from Paris as soon as possible, and did not want to be bothered with any outside affairs. After paying him for his services I said good-bye, just as the sun was gilding the east. I looked in at my wife; she was sleeping as peacefully as a child, and throwing myself on a sofa, I pulled a rug over me and was soon asleep.

"I was awakened a few hours later by the vigorous ringing of Maria's bell. Jumping up, I hastened to her side, and from her reception of my news, properly administered as befitting such intelligence to an invalid, I was convinced that I had indeed found Maria, and in her normal condition."

G. C. B.



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By HEADON HILL.

Author of "The Peril of the Prince," "Seaward for the Foe," "Guilty Gold," etc.

CHAPTER XIV. (*continued*).

"I say, it is nearly eleven o'clock; my father will be here directly," he bleated. "Wouldn't it be fun to have a lark with him?"

"As to how?" asked the winner.

"Why, run me up in the lift, so that when he comes in he won't see me," said the "Kid." "Then when he's fairly scared at my not being here, run me down again, and there I am in front of him, like a Jack-in-the-box. Do, please."

A practical joke at the expense of an anxious father was quite in the line of Tamponi's patrons, and the idea caught on instantly.

"Keep your head back, then, and sit quite still till we run you down," was the reply, and the jerk of a rope sent the lift spinning merrily up the shaft, with the "Kid" huddled in it like a chicken in an egg. The bevy of flushed faces was blotted from his sight, the noisy racket of the bar grew suddenly faint and far off, there were three seconds of black darkness, and the youthful detective stood on the first floor triumphant, with the door of the locked room in front of him.

The key had been removed; but Fergusson's forethought had provided him with the means of entering, and he worked the picklocks with feverish haste, lest the heedless crew below should take it into their heads to pull down the lift.

Two or three of the instruments he tried in vain, and then the fourth did the trick, and the door opened, revealing the apparently lifeless body of Zambra lying in his waiter's dress by the piano. Snatching the brandy decanter from the table, the boy poured such dregs as were left between his master's lips, and in five seconds the latter was struggling to his feet, eager to hear what his young assistant had to tell him.

That was no place for words, but it was the proudest moment the "Kid's" professional career had yet brought him, when at the close of his briefly whispered narrative Zambra wrung his hand and said as they glided on to the landing:

"There may yet be time to head off these villains; if so, it is of your making, my boy. Ah, I thought so. Here is a second staircase leading to the private entrance. Step softly, and a minute will see us safely in the street."

CHAPTER XV.

THE DEAD MAN'S SECRET.

By the time Marion had disentangled her dress, Simon had his foot on the bottom step. Acting on a frantic impulse to place some barrier, no matter what, between her and that cruel smile, the girl pulled the door to after her, and stood clinging to the handle for dear life. In doing so she had at first no hope other than to gain a few seconds' respite, but it quickly flashed upon her that it might mean more than that. The door, opening inwards, had no handle on the reverse side. There was nothing, therefore, for her assailants to catch hold of in order to open it by pulling it towards them. So long as by throwing all her weight on the handle and dragging it to her, she could keep the door so tightly closed that they could not get their fingers in, so long would she be able to keep them at bay.

Almost immediately there was a scratching and fumbling on the inside of the jamb, and the hateful voice croaked:

"It is only I, my dear niece—your poor old Uncle Sam, depriving himself of his night's rest on your behalf. I have an assistant of your friend, Mr. Zambra, with me. We are acting on his instructions to test a theory about the missing money, and we came in through the kitchen window so as not to disturb you. Open the door, there's a good girl, and I will soon explain to your satisfaction."

"You murdering villain!" Marion called through the door, "I heard every word you said in the sitting-room and down there just now. You may kill me, but you cannot deceive me again."

There was no direct reply, but Hoathley turned and called to Tasker, and the fumbling and scratching began again. One of them was endeavouring to get enough purchase on the door to open it wide enough for the insertion of a finger; but Marion, grasping the handle and leaning back with her feet firmly planted, was able to frustrate their efforts. For quite half an hour the contest continued, and a wild hope began to take possession of her that she might hold out till help came. Morning was beginning to break, and in an hour or two there might be early haymakers passing on their way to work whom she could attract by screaming, failing which the farm boy who brought her milk was due at seven o'clock. It would be worse than useless to try to raise an alarm as yet; she must husband her strength till the world was awake.

Suddenly there was a muttered oath on the other side of the door, and the fingering and groping ceased. Marion thought it was a ruse to make her relax her grasp, but she soon found that the attempt had only been dropped to be replaced by others of a more effectual kind. Hoathley had thrown aside all pretence now, and his voice came plainly through the door, bidding Tasker fetch the crowbar.

"Enough of these bungling experiments," he hissed, addind more loudly, "we're going to break the door down, my lady, so you'd better say your prayers, unless you'd rather wait till the Reverend Simon comes through to shrive you."

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The ferocious sarcasm was followed by repeated blows from the heavy iron tool on the framework of the door. The point of the instrument was directed at the seam of the jamb, with the evident object of gaining such a vantage that the crowbar could be used as a lever. Marion's heart sank as the door quivered beneath the crashing assault, and she recognised that her last bulwark was doomed. Though the massive old oak offered a stout resistance, and there was no room on the narrow steps for more than one to carry on the assault at the same time, yet it was plain that the catastrophe would not be long delayed. Now and agasn the point of the crowbar penetrated far enough to effect a lodgment, and the wrench that followed nearly broke Marion's wrist. But still the desperate girl held on, knowing with Hoathley's villainous words ringing in her ears, that to yield was to die. Well it was that she did so, for every few minutes the crafty wretch would lay aside his implement to make, in the quiet that followed, a stealthy attempt with his fingers, on the chance that her vigilence was relaxed.

It was after one of these pauses that the crowbar was driven home with increased violence, and Simon's voice was heard, saying:

"Well done, another in the same place and we have her," Evidently the younger and stronger arm had relieved the elder. Another such blow and the end would be at hand. Marion gave herself up for lost and as hope fled away she found herself wondering at the great calm that had been vouchsafed to her.

An hour before she had dreaded death, but now she chiefly saw in the coming tragedy a sure and certain deliverance for Cuthbert Blakesly. A feeling of relief that suspense would now be past, and a simple hope that her persecutors would not be unnecessarily cruel, were the sensations that flashed through her as she waited for the next stroke to fall.

Five seconds more and it came, smashing and tearing through the woodwork, with such force that a few splinters fell out at Marion's feet.

There was a triumphant chuckle from within, and a hoarse croak of "Put all your muscle into it, man," and Marion felt the door wrenched from her clutch, to open inwards, and reveal the flushed face of Tasker, and Hoathley's oily sneer on the steps below.

The elder scoundrel took off his hat, and made a mock bow, nodding and smiling at his victim, as he had done on the occasion of his first appearance at the window, and it was the moment's delay caused by his fantastic pantomime that saved Marion's life. For just as Hoathley began to push past his companion, with his right hand plunged deep in his breast pocket, there was a thunderous knock at the front door, and sweeter than any music, the voices of many men and peremptory demands for admission fell on Marion's ears.

With a wild cry of joy she sprang backwards and rushed across the hall to withdraw the bolts. Casting a look behind she saw Hoathley emerge from the cellar, and after one hesitating glance in her direction run in his stockinged feet down the passage towards the kitchen, quickly followed by Tasker. It was nearly daylight now, and Marion made short work of the chains and bolts, shouting as she did so, "They are gone by the back."

Instantly there was a rush of feet as some of the party ran round to the rear, and the next moment, as the door swung open, Zambra with a bandage on his head, and looking very pale and stern, burst across the threshold followed by Superintendent Gunning, Inspector Dimmock, and several others.

"Through the kitchen, I think," was all Marion could say, as she sank panting against the wall to let them pass.

"Look after the lady," cried Zambra, rushing by, and Neil Ferguson, who had accompanied his master, remained to obey the injunction. The rest hurried through the kitchen, where an open window showed how the entrance and egress had been effected. The pursuers leaped through in hot haste, to find that those who had run round the house at Marion's cry were close to the heels of the quarry. Hoathley, slightly in advance, was making for the corner of the unfinished wall which Michael had built between the waste garden ground and the paddock. Tasker followed at a few paces interval, while the most nimble of the policemen was running well up on the tracks of the broker's clerk. Suddenly one of Tasker's shoeless feet came in contact with a jagged stone. and with a cry of rage he fell to the ground Quick as lightning his right hand dived into his hip pocket, and there was a glint of metal.

"Look out, constable! he's going to shoot," shouted Zambra, hurrying forward.

But the pistol was not turned on his pursuers. Lying on his side as he fell, Tasker levelled the revolver at Hoathley's flying figure, just as the latter was rounding the angle of the wall. There was a sharp report, a scream of fear and pain, and the arch-villain rolled over writhing like a scotched snake in the dewy grass. And then the hue and cry closed round.

"Handcuff and search them at once, men," said the superintendent. "I notice that the bullet has smashed his kneecap, and passing on has splintered a brick at the corner of the wall."

"I strongly suspect it has done more than that," said Zambra, who had pushed through the crowd, and was on his knees picking at the split brick with the point of his penknife "If I am not very much mistaken, it has solved the mystery of the missing money, and clinched my theory that Standbridge hid the hoard himself after, or before, building the strong-room as a blind. See here!" and as he spoke he detached a sovereign from the interior of the brick, where it had been embedded in the clay before baking. The edges of two similar coins were also sticking from the fragment, which on being further broken up yielded altogether five pounds in gold.

"Pull down a few more bricks in different places," said Zambra to one of the constables not occupied in guarding the prisoners, and on the order being carried out, each brick was found to contain five sovereigns similarly embedded. Zambra ran his eye over the wall and made a rapid calculation.

"The wall is about thirty yards long, and, roughly, there are, say, a hundred bricks in each yard of its length, which gives us an approximate total of three thousand bricks. Suppose five sovereigns to be in each brick, we get as a result the sum of £15,000, which, allowing for errors, is sufficiently near the amount which Mr. Standbridge withdrew from the bank. Gentlemen, I think we may look upon this case as in a fair way to be cleared up."

The baffled greed and hate on Simon Hoathley's face were bad to see as he grovelled on the ground while a policeman tried to staunch the blood from his wounded knee. He forgot the pain in the agony of Zambra's discovery—a discovery which meant that he had forfeited his life for what he never could have gained, and that Michael's cunning had after all overmatched his own. But his cup was not yet full. As yet he was in ignorance that it was his accomplice who had shot him, and he was to learn the fact in a manner which brushed away the last lingering shred of hope.

True to his maxim of adapting himself to circumstances, Swinley Tasker had already chosen the *rôle* which the altered conditions demanded. He meant to play the part of the model prisoner who "goes quietly" and "gives every assistance to the police." Assuming an air of respectful penitence dashed with indignation, he addressed the superintendent. Marion and Fergusson had now joined the group.

Read the next footline backwards.

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"I wish to make a statement," said Tasker. "I want to tell you why I helped to prevent that man's escape. I know that you will use what I say against me, but I can't help that. I shall get more credit by speaking than by silence."

"Go on," said Gunning, producing his notebook; "I am taking down your statement to be used as evidence, remember."

"I shot that scoundrel," proceeded Tasker, "because he led me into this trouble in ignorance that there was to be murder in it, and also because, till my bullet revealed the secret, I believed that Hoathley had himself removed the gold. I thought he had brought me here in order to compromise me in a second murder; and when I tripped and fell I was wild to think that he might escape and leave me to bear the brunt.

"These are the facts of Michael Standbridge's murder. Some time towards the end of last year Hoathley came to the office of Strauss and Lightfoot, where I was employed, and offered a few diamonds for sale. In the course of the transaction he told me that he had been done out of a share of a big diamond by the drowning, or supposed drowning, of a partner, for even then he had his doubts if the man were really dead. The conversation recalled to my mind a sale to the firm some months previously of a very valuable diamond by a person who called himself Wilson. Lightfoot, who had only then begun to suspect me of evil courses, tried to keep the knowledge of the deal from me; but I saw the entry in his cheque-book and guessed the rest.

"When he was at our office, this man Wilson—I now know him to have been Mr. Standbridge—treated me roughly, and I had a grudge against him On the chance of gratifying it I had preserved an envelope in his writing, and this I showed to Hoathley, who at once recognised it as having been written by his partner and half-brother. Hoathley then made a bargain with me that if I would give him Standbridge's address he would share with me anything he could recover. I regret to say that having got into bad company, and being involved by betting, I was unable to withstand the inducement. I gave the address at the Metropolitan and Counties Bank, at Reading, whence Hoathley easily traced Mr. Standbridge here.

"Hoathley spent many months in Reading in disguise, and learned all the rumours about the strong-room and the supposed hoard. He also ascertained that the only person with whom the deceased was at all intimate was Blakesly, the cashier at the bank, and he has since told me that it was on that account he decided to throw suspicion on Mr. Blakesly in any scheme he might carry out. He had a double reason for involving Blakesly when he learned early last week that Mr. Standbridge's daughter had turned up in the young lady to whom Blakesly was engaged.

"It was this discovery which precipitated matters. Four days before the murder I had a letter from Hoathley at Reading asking me to take the envelope in my possession which had been written by Mr. Standbridge as a copy, and to forge a letter and envelope of which he sent me the draft.

"The letter was the one mentioned by Blakesly at the inquest, inviting him to Kennett's Cross. I forged the letter and envelope the same night at my lodgings, and posted them under cover to Hoathley at Reading. I had no idea that Hoathley meant to commit murder, but I confess that I thought he intended to use the letter in some scheme for robbing his half-brother.

"On the day after the murder Hoathley came to me in London and informed me of the failure of his plans—how he had brought Blakesly to the spot by means of the forged letter, and how he had himself killed Michael Standbridge, only to find that he was unable to open the strong-room because he could not discover the key.

"He also told me that he had provided for suspicion falling on Blakesly by setting fire to the furze at the roadside so that he might be seen by witnesses on his return. The story told by Blakesly at the inquest about the trapped kitten was perfectly true. The kitten and the trap were brought there by Hoathley, and the animal was placed in the trap and deposited by the gate when Mr. Standbridge and the cashier came to the door. The ruse was successful in leaving the coast clear for Hoathley to slip into the house, and it served the double purpose of getting bloodstains on to Blakesly's clothes. Hoathley further informed me that he supplemented the manufactured evidence by cutting his own wrist purposely and letting the blood drop on the bell of the bicycle, so that human blood might be found in the event of analysis.

"Hoathley hid behind the sitting-room door, and when Standbridge returned to the room stabbed him in the back. He wiped his weapon on an envelope which he picked up from the floor, and which he recognised as being the one I had forged. Mr. Blakesly must have dropped it during the evening.

"Out of a spirit of devilment, and to puzzle the police, Hoathley put the envelope in the tobacco jar on the mantel-piece, but after he came away he saw that he had made a mistake. If Blakesly had really committed the crime he would have destroyed or taken the envelope right away—not hidden it where it was likely to be discovered. However, the envelope was not at first found by the police, and seeing that it was not produced at the inquest. Hoathley determined to recover it on his second visit. It had then disappeared from the tobacco-jar, and would doubtless have been used by the police as a point against Blakesly at the trial."

"That envelope has led to the present development," put in Zambra quietly, to the great surprise of the already crestfallen Inspector Dimmock and the group of policemen who accompanied him.

"I was upset by the turn the matter had taken," proceeded Tasker, "and I wanted to have done with Hoathley, but he pointed out that I was compromised as an accessory, and had better stick to him. As soon as we saw in the papers that the strong room was found empty, we came to the conclusion that the money was hidden somewhere—as like as not built up in the strong-room walls or floor. He went down to the neighbourhood on the Monday—the day of the inquest—and the next morning, disguised in the character of an American detective, learned that the police had been unsuccessful in their search for the——"

"Good Heavens," groaned Dimmock, "did he take the name of Keeling?"

"That was it, I think."

"And I called him a kindred spirit," murmured the unfortunate detective under his breath.

"He found that some constables were guarding the house day and night," proceeded Tasker, "but he relied on them being withdrawn in a day or two—as, in fact they were—though our plans for getting into the house and ransacking it at our leisure were frustrated by Miss Standbridge having taken up her residence there. Hoathley made this discovery at Mrs. Bonfield's, where he had called on the chance of picking up some useful information. There being only an unprotected woman now at Kennett's Cross, he determined to go there at once to recover the envelope and search for traces of the hoard, and in order to gain Miss Standbridge's confidence, and access to the house, he represented himself as her uncle and a clergyman. He had found from the clergy list that the rector of a distant country parish bore the name and had the same initial, which he thought would justify apppearances in the event of inquiries being made before he gained his end. I believe he would have murdered the young lady that night, and broken down the strong, room if he had not been afraid that I might split if I was not in it with him.

Keew txen snigeb frawd nedlog eht.

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"He came back to town and assured me that the money could be nowhere else but in the strong-room walls, and as he said he could not pull the place down single-handed, he insisted on my accompanying him. The final arrangements were made at Tamponi's Restaurant, and while there we were warned that the waiter who was attending us was Zambra, the well-known detective. He had been recognised by a person in the bar who had seen him in a similar disguise some time ago. Hoathley disabled Mr. Zambra, and we came to Reading by the last train, thinking that there would be plenty of time to complete the job before the railway or telegraph would be available. I can only say that I had no intention myself of harming the young lady."

"And very little intention of preventing Hoathley from doing so, I imagine," said the superintendent, closing his note-book. "Get the prisoners away as quick as you can, and have that man's leg attended to," he continued, addressing a sergeant, and, as the central setting of a cluster of blue coats, Hoathley and Tasker disappeared for ever from the scene of their villainy.

The superintendant and Dimmock remained behind to confer with Marion and Zambra about extracting the gold from the wall. The operation, which was subsequently carried out by Ferguson, in the presence of the police, yielded in all the sum of £14,180, which, allowing for the money expended on the purchase of Kennett's Cross, that remaining in the bank, and the amount used for his own purposes, represented the sum which Michael should have had in his possession.

When the procession guarding the prisoners had passed round the corner of the house, the rest gathered round Marion to hear the story of the night, and to congratulate her on her pluck in holding out till help arrived. But she could not forget quite so quickly the suspicion which Gunning and Dimmock had fastened on her lover.

"I think you should remember that if it had not been for Mr. Zambra there would have been no help to wait for," she said.

"I quite allow that," said Dimmock, who, divested of officialism, was not a bad fellow, "but I shall never forgive myself for not finding that envelope."

"Don't take that to heart," said Zambra; "*I* didn't find it. It was the young lady who brought that to light. And I don't mean to take any credit to myself, but rather to the scientific methods which are my speciality, when I say that the envelope was a good deal better in my hands than yours."

And he told the astonished officials of the hidden post-mark which had given him the first clue to the criminals.

"But after all," said Zambra, "it is not you only who have to regret shortcomings. It is a singular fact that I never bring a case to a successful conclusion without finding on looking back that somewhere in the course of it I have bungled."

"Not in this case, surely?" asked Dimmock, rather eagerly.

"Yes," replied Zambra, "and my mistake might have cost me my life, and my client hers. I should have allowed for the possibility of recognition, closely disguised as I was, in such a place as Tamponi's. If it had not been for the smartness of a lad in my employment that knock on the head might have caused fatal loss of time. But the boy—he will make a name some day—was equal to the emergency. He has been keeping communication between myself and my office, and had been given the tip to stick to Tasker and Hoathley in case they left the restaurant without me in attendance. But having managed to hear their directions to the cabman, he remained to try and get me out of my fix, and succeeded by means of a ruse that must be making the smart crowd on whom he played it feel pretty sick by now. The proprietor might have objected to violence, but he would have been powerless to prevent the other blackguards keeping me there—out of spite, for of course they did not know that a girl's life depended on my getting free. Once out of the place I was soon myself.

"They soon brought me to, and I was able to hurry to Paddington and engage a special engine to Reading, where we were fortunate enough to enlist your invaluable assistance."

"I suppose," said Marion, as they walked back to the house, "that there is no doubt that the secret my father spoke of was the secret of the wall."

"Unquestionably," said Zambra. "My impression is that he would have imparted it to you very shortly as soon as he had assured himself that your engagement to Mr. Blakesly was desirable. The hiding of the gold was evidently a hobby with him, and he did not like to part with it until he felt certain of your happiness. It is possible he meant to tell you on your wedding day.

"One thing is clearly explained," continued Zambra. "This man Hoathley was evidently the cause of your father's apprehension of danger to himself and to his property. After picking up the Tasker clue at Strauss' office and before going to Worcester Park, I procured a list of the *Trojan's* passengers for the voyage when Mr. Standbridge returned. Hoathley was on board, and I have no doubt that it was to escape him that your father attempted to give him the slip by changing his name and getting ashore unseen. How he accomplished this I do not yet know; but I may be able to ascertain."

As a matter of fact, the point was cleared up later by the signalman at Hurst Castle, who came forward on reading of the case, and described his midnight visitor.

And now the mystery of Kennett's Cross is told. That same afternoon Cuthbert Blakesly was admitted to bail. Having been committed, he had to be tried at the Assizes, but he was immediately acquitted, and was called as a principal witness at the trial of Hoathley. The latter recovered sufficiently to stand in the dock, and being convicted of the murder of Michael Standbridge, was hanged in due course of the law. His face, when Zambra in the witness-box related what he had heard at Tamponi's, and produced the cat's fur which he had extracted from Hoathley's overcoat pocket, was a picture of malevolent hate. In the murder trial Tasker was allowed to give evidence for the Queen, but he was afterwards tried for the separate charges of forgery and burglary, and was sentenced to penal servitude for life.

Kennett's Cross was razed to the ground, but nearer the town there is a pretty cottage where Marion and Cuthbert are always glad to see their friends. Among the latter must be reckoned Mrs. Bonfield, who long since apologetic and reconciled, is sure of a welcome whenever she runs over from The Limes.

"I owe the dear old soul so much, and I treated her so badly," Marion says sometime; and then she will add: "But I had no thought of any that awful week—save for one."

And Cuthbert, in the full knowledge of what his brave wife did for him, quite understands.

THE END.

THE GOLDEN DWARF.

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THE feet that are covered with bunions may not be stylish, but they are certainly "knobby."

SHE: "Those people next door are still on their honeymoon." He: "Do you think so?" She "Yes; he goes shopping with her."

"I AM told your wife would rather cook than eat," "What she cooks, yes," he replied in a hoarse whisper. The other glanced nervously over his shoulder. They were alone.

TOTO (in tears): "Boo-oo-oo!" Papa: "What's the matter with that boy now?" Toto: "Oh, pa, I've swallowed one of the cartridges of your revolver." Papa: "You little wretch. And I can't even give you a thrashing for fear of exploding the cartridge."

"BY Jove! that's a pretty girl!" said one of the travellers, throwing himself half out of the window to see her. "For Heaven's sake pull in your head!" shouted his companion. "What's the matter?" was the terrified inquiry. "Why"—suiting the action to the word—"I want that window to look at her myself."

A CLERK in a Manchester office, who was a bit of a sprinter, was always talking about sports. "Athletics on the brain," remarked the chief to himself one day. This knight of the "pump" had been repeatedly cautioned about neglecting his work and taking up his fellow clerks' time with his descriptions of last Saturday's meeting, but they evidently fell on deaf ears, for his "boss" time after time caught words pertaining to sports. In the middle of one of his discourses he was saying, "the turn out for the mile handicap was extra, and——" but he was interrupted by his chief standing behind him, saying: "Go and get your hat and coat and 'turn out' for the sack race."

* IN New Zealand, as elsewhere, it is the fashion to give prize cattle high-sounding names; so when Mrs. J—— received a message from her husband, who was attending the session in town, asking her to send to Wairito station to meet the Duke of Manchester, who was visiting New Zealand, she naturally thought he meant another prize bull he had been speculating in, and on the day appointed sent down a man on horse-back, with a good stout tether-rope, to convey the Duke to his new home. The man was at the station in time. The train arrived, two gentlemen got out, and the train went on again. "Is there an one here to meet the Duke of Manchester?" asked one of the gentlemen. "Here I be's," said the man, coming forward, "an' here be's the rope to tether 'un. But where be's the Juke?"

"CECIL VAN DUNSE gave me a piece of his mind to-day." "I noticed you weren't as brilliant as usual."

SKIED.—Palette: "We bow to the works of the old masters." Smiler: "Yes; but, dear boy, reflect that if they were on earth they'd have to look up to yours."

A CLERGYMAN on a recent sultry afternoon paused in his sermon and said: "I saw an advertisement last week for 500 sleepers on a railroad. I think I could supply fifty, and recommend them as tried and sound."

TEACHER: "You may tell us, Tommy, some of the ways in which the element of fire confers a benefit on the human race." Tommy (who knows something of his father's business methods: "When the amount of the insurance exceeds the value of the stock on hand."

HUSBAND (after a quarrel with his wife): "Well, let us drop it. I don't care to have any words about it, and besides I like to talk to a sensible person when I am talking." Wife (with a sarcastic laugh): "You don't always do it then." H.: "I don't?" W.: "No. I sometimes hear you talking to yourself."

ACTRESS: "Say, Mr. Poster, I see you are sending paragraphs to the papers saying that I am getting a salary of £100 a week, one of the largest salaries ever paid to an actress." Manager: "Yes, I am; it's a good advertisement for you, you know." Actress: "Well, all I have to say about it is that I want a raise of salary to £10. I never work for less than ten per cent. of my advertised salary."

SCENE—The gaming table at Monte Carlo. Young English lady with her little sister and a gentleman whose acquaintance they had recently made while travelling. Young Lady: "Now, I shall just try one five-franc piece on the number of my age," putting one on number eighteen. Number twenty-seven wins. Little sister: "Oh, Maud, what fun! Now, if you had put it on your right age you would have won, wouldn't you?"

AN old lady, who was visiting a garrison town for the first time in her life, was much startled when the customary gun was fired at sunset. "Bless me, what ever's the matter?" she inquired in a fright. "It's only the sunset, ma'am," replied the landlady reassuringly. "You don't say so!" exclaimed the old lady more amazed than ever. "Why, in London, the sun sets as quietly as anything, but perhaps we don't hear the bang on account of the traffic," she conceded after a moment's meditation.

AN artist had sold a picture for an exorbitant price, and the purchaser sued to recover. The barrister for the purchaser was making the artist uncomfortable by his questions. "Now, sir," he said, in that pleasant, ingratiating manner of lawyers with a witness, "do you think anybody could see beauty in that picture?" "Some persons certainly could," replied the artist. "You think the initiated in technical matters might have no difficulty in understanding your work?" "I am sure they would not." "Do you think you could make me see any beauty in that picture?"—this most superciliously. "Probably not now, sir," and the artist was most humble, "but once I could have done so easily." "Now, sir, how is that? I don't understand you. Explain, if you please." "That's quite easy, sir, I could have done it simply by employing you as my counsel in this case."

Order next week's "Short Stories" now, or you may miss it.

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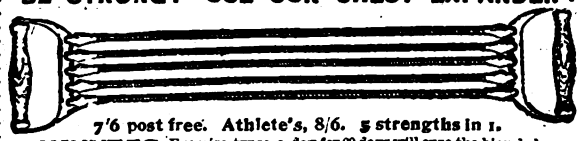

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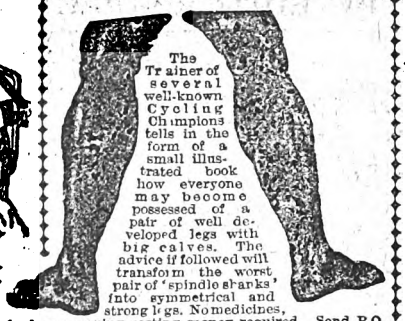

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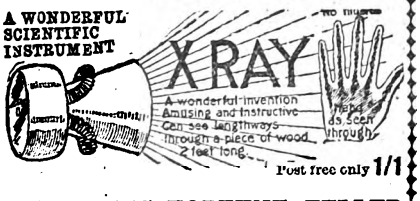

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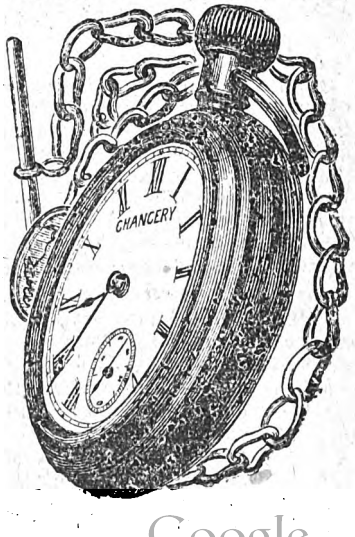

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

Next week's issue will be the number of numbers. For in that will appear the opening chapters of

"The Golden Dwarf."

Into this great story Mr. R. Norman Silver has put his very best work. With that wondrous ingenuity for which he is famous, he has woven a plot which you will be clever indeed to solve before the author himself comes to your assistance. This baffling mystery runs throughout the story, while an undercurrent of pure and tender love winds its way through the troubled waters—but there! I won't go on. I might divulge too much of the story, and I don't want to do that.

❦❦❦

"The Golden Dwarf" is going to do a lot for *Short Stories*. It is going to obtain for it tens of thousands of new enthusiastic readers. That is a point I am quite certain about. For the story is one which cannot fail to make people talk about it. There is only one point on which I am a little anxious. That is that many people will be disappointed in not being able to get next week's *Short Stories*. The demand is certain to be greatly in excess of the supply, and those who do not take the precaution of ordering the paper beforehand will probably "get left."

❦❦❦

"Percy."—The average weight of a man is 140 pounds; of a woman, 125.

Lunatics are smaller than sane people, and are seldom fat. On the other hand, centenarians are also generally small-boned and lean.

The blood completes its circuit through the body in twenty-two seconds, and in three minutes every drop passes through the heart and lungs and is revitalised.

Figure this out. A drop of blood will travel 61,320 miles a year. In eighty-four years a blood corpuscle would travel 5,150,808 miles.

For that matter, a reasonably active man walks about 297,200 miles—more than ten times the earth's circumference—in eighty-four years, just trotting about his house and office.

❦❦❦

"Recruit."—An old cavalry man says that a horse will never step on a man intentionally. It is a standing order in the British cavalry that, should a man become dismounted, he must lie down and keep perfectly still. If he does so, the entire troop will pass over him without his being injured. A horse notices where he is going, and is on the look-out for a firm foundation to put his foot on. It is an instinct with him, therefore, to step over a prostrate man. The injuries caused to human beings by a runaway horse are nearly always inflicted by the animal knocking them down, and not by his stepping on them.

❦❦❦

"Loch Lomond."—Freckles are the result of too much iron in the blood, and the sun's rays bring the iron-stained spots to the surface. In other words, freckles are iron rust. Face bleaches said to remove freckles are very dangerous compounds to have any dealings with. They are made almost without exception of a solution of corrosive sublimate and water, and are extremely painful as well as dangerous. But here is a formula for the removal of freckles which has been tried with surprising success. It is as follows. It has the advantage of being harmless:

Four ounces lactic acid.
Two ounces glycerine.
One ounce rose water.

Apply with a small soft sponge two or three times daily.

This lotion will cause a slight burning of the skin, which is part of the process of extinction of freckles. The use of a little witchhazel cream to the irritated surface will allay the burning. Witchhazel cream is made as follows:

One ounce each of white wax and spermaceti, and one quarter pint of almonds. Melt, pour the mixture into a mortar which has been heated by being immersed for some time in boiling water; add very gradually three ounces of rose water and one ounce of witchhazel, and assiduously stir the mixture until an emulsion is formed, and afterwards until the mixture is nearly cold. Or you can get any chemist to prepare the prescription. Suit the use of the freckle lotion to the condition of your skin. It is never intended to produce more than a slight superficial redness. If the redness and burning are uncomfortable, omit the freckle lotion for a day or two, using the witchhazel cream meantime. Be careful of nostrums warranted to do impossible things in a few hours.

❦❦❦

"Carberry."—The inhabitants of Gomera Island, one of the Canaries, converse with each other by whistling. A German officer, who has spent some time on the island, describes the whistling language as follows:

It consists of the ordinary speech of the natives, expressed by articulate whistling. Each syllable has its own appropriate tone.

The whistler uses both fingers and lips, and it is asserted that conversation can be kept up at a distance of a mile. Whistling is said to be confined to Gomera Island, and to be quite unknown on the other islands of the group.

The adoption of this mode of carrying on conversation is due to the geological formation of the island, which is intersected by frequent gullies and ravines. As there are no bridges across the ravines, intercourse between neighbours is often difficult.

A man living within a stone's throw of another may have to go many miles around to make a call upon his neighbour, and the inconvenience of intercourse caused the gradual formation of a whistling language.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 4,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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SHORT STORIES

THE GOLDEN DWARF

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 652.] For the Week Ending June 29th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

THE GOLDEN DWARF.

BEGINS TO-DAY.

"Don't look like that," Judith whispered, "pull yourself together."

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The Golden Dwarf

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

CHAPTER I.

At the Cross-roads.

"Money, of course I want money; I don't usually remind you of my existence for any other reason. Besides, I said so in the letter."

"The letter you dated from London, yesterday, and posted here in the High Street—as the envelope shows—at twelve o'clock last night."

A moment's silence followed this unexpected answer. It was broken by a muttered oath and the fierce retort:

"You keep your prying eyes to yourself, my dear little sister, or I may have to teach you a lesson you won't forget in a hurry. The less respectable folk learn of Neal Garland's private life, Judith, the better for them. Now what cash have you brought? I want to get out of this villainous hole; I never was in it before and I never wish to be again."

Judith Garland studied her brother a moment, and then reluctantly, produced a fashionable purse of alligator-hide.

She was that magnificent creature, a handsome woman scarcely past her girlhood—dark-haired, dark-orbed, with resolute, scornful lips and a clear, yet dusky complexion. Her grey walking-costume, pretty hat, and frilled chiffon parasol suggested that her social position was a comfortable one.

The man at her elbow bore a certain resemblance to the woman he had just called "sister."

But his garments were threadbare and his felt bowler greased by long use, while his crumpled linen and soiled hands told a tale of squalid poverty.

Around this singular couple lay a sweep of pleasant English country—shone on by the blue sky of a fine July morning.

Close to, several thoroughfares met at an iron cross—most of them winding lanes with green borders, shut in by dense hedgerows, with now and then a stile, such as that against which Neal Garland—dingy, unkempt, miserable—was lounging.

The smart figure of the woman was almost concealed by the luxuriant fence of hawthorn, into whose shelter she had skilfully withdrawn herself.

Neal gazed hungrily at the coins his sister had emptied into her gloved palm. There were a brace of sovereigns and a florin or two. Judith gave him the yellow discs, sighing heavily as she relinquished them.

"Is that all you can raise?" he growled; "why it will scarcely do more than carry me up to town again. I asked for twenty pounds, you've let me have nothing for more than a year."

He pocketed, notwithstanding, the despised coins.

"It leaves me," responded Judith irritably; "just six shillings, and the first of the month is more than a week off. Neal, you didn't visit Wyresdale simply to plunder me; you'd have told me where to send the money or have followed your note and come by the morning express. To disguise the fact that you were here yesterday, spying on me, probably, you headed your letter (posted, and no doubt written, last night in Wyresdale) as if it had been dispatched from London. You might have remembered, all the same, that, as you'd never been to Wyresdale, you couldn't have appointed, before seeing the place, to meet me in this extremely convenient spot. However, if you won't explain, you won't."

Her brother scowled.

"You're a clever hussy, Judith," he said, "make yourself easy, I've not been worrying about you. Take my advice and don't poke your nose into my affairs."

"Then," observed Judith, patronisingly, "you will perhaps prove, in future, a more considerate correspondent, and not write to the great Lady Dering's companion in an unstamped envelope with a pencilled address. And, oh, I do hope, Neal, if you stopped at the village inn in that shabby state, you didn't give your name as Garland. If I hadn't been afraid of you doing something silly and damaging me irremediably with the Derings, I'd have taken no notice of your letter."

"Quite so," assented Neal; "that's why I proposed to collect the cash myself. As it happens, I haven't required an alias; I didn't stay at an inn, I was too hard up, I—I slept out."

"Good Heavens, where?" cried Judith.

Neal Garland jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

The gesture indicated an apparently endless wall of red brick, backed by lofty trees whose thick foliage murmured drowsily as the warm breeze fanned it.

"In there," he added drily.

"In there!" repeated his sister, astonished; "then you may be thankful you weren't caught in one of the Golden Dwarf's man-traps or worried by his dogs."

"Deuce take your local bogies," said Neal; "when can you let me have that other eighteen quid? I'm not going to part from Wyresdale without it if I'm forced to visit Dering House and request an interview with you at the front door."

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Judith Garland quailed.

"Don't be insane, Neal," she begged; "do you want me to lose my position?"

"What do I care for your position?" demanded her brother, with brutal indifference; "there, I can't argue the matter, we're too public. I'll allow you till to-morrow night to fork out; I shall be at this stile by ten o'clock in the evening. And see you don't fool me or you'll repent it. I've got to have the money or I'm stranded."

"I haven't another half-sovereign in the world," said Judith, desperately; "you have left me six shillings and not a halfpenny more."

"Get an advance of salary," was the curt rejoinder.

"Impossible," declared Judith Garland; "Lady D. is in for a week of hysterics. Her husband went out riding yesterday afternoon and hasn't yet condescended to return; she is having the entire county searched for him. When he is unearthed, there'll be a storm, for Sir Christopher hates to appear ridiculous. No, this is decidedly not the time for Miss Judith Garland, who is only my lady's genteel dependant, to solicit an advance of salary, or, indeed, apply for any sort of favour."

"Very well," said Neal, savagely; "get the tin how and where you choose; I must have it. You know me of old. By-bye, till ten to-morrow evening."

He took a stride athwart the strip of ragged turf that fringed the dusty macadam. Suddenly pausing, he retraced his steps.

"I say," he ejaculated; "what on earth did you mean by your fairy story about dogs and man-traps and a golden dwarf?"

His sister pointed to the blank red wall which formed a huge angle opposite them. "That is Wyresdale Park," she answered; "the home of Mr. Otto Hare. He is enormously rich and lives there shut up from the world, cursing the fate that denied him the ordinary stature of his sex. Otto Hare, my dear Neal, is the Golden Dwarf and the Golden Dwarf is Mr. Otto Hare—golden because of his wealth and dwarf because of his inches."

"And the man-traps and dogs?" queried Neal Garland. He was knitting his black brows in a curiously abstracted frown.

"For the benefit of inquisitive trespassers," said Judith: "Neal," she added bitterly, "I could wish that you had come by your death in Wyresdale Park!" She set her gleaming teeth at the words and her nostrils dilated with dangerous passion.

Neal laughed contemptuously. "I believe," he told her, "if I had asked you for fifty pounds you would have done for me yourself. But as it's only twenty you'll grumble and—find it. Thanks for the tip about the bow-wows and the infernal machines; it may prove useful."

He waved a mocking palm and slouched off. The graceful figure of Judith Garland shrank hastily into the shelter of the hawthorn hedge; the sound of a horse's hoofs had fallen upon her ear. She lowered her fleecy parasol and peered out, cautiously. A mounted man, young, gallant, booted and spurred, was cantering towards the cross-roads.

A strange light leapt into Judith's striking countenance and her dark cheeks glowed.

"Felix Dering!" she murmured, and took an impulsive step into the open. Her grey dress made her a conspicuous object, the horseman drew rein, lifted his cap and sprang from his saddle.

Judith Garland went to the rustic stile over which she had so recently been conversing with her brother. An expression of surprise and disappointment shadowed the other's face, but it vanished before Judith perceived it.

"Good morning, Miss Garland," he said, passing an arm through the bridle of his chestnut; "you are abroad early."

Judith was studying him admiringly—he was a good-looking, athletic Saxon, with a powerful chin, grey eyes, and a strong, straight nose.

"Yes," she admitted, indolently; "I cannot stand Lady Dering without an occasional interval. By-the-way, what has your uncle done with himself?"

"Done," repeated the master of the chestnut, patting his steed nervously; "is he—indisposed?"

"That is the question," pursued Judith; "no one has seen him since yesterday afternoon, and Lady Dering is distracted. You are almost as serious a delinquent, Mr. Dering."

"Oh, I rode into Duchester," rejoined Felix Dering, colouring; "I got detained and stayed at an hotel."

"Was the quarrel as bad as that?" inquired Judith Garland: "forgive me, Mr. Dering, I couldn't help guessing that Sir Christopher and you had had a—a misunderstanding."

Felix sighed heavily.

"Yes," he owned; "I had a fight for my freedom; luckily, I conquered. I am actually to be permitted to seek my own fortune for myself; but, unless he relents, without my uncle's blessing. And I fear he will not forgive me until he obtains an equally satisfactory steward for the Dering estate. But what can have kept him from home all night?—he must have met with some accident."

"He imitated your example," said Judith, calmly; "ordered his horse and galloped away from Dering House, to work off his irritation, I imagine. And, like you, he must have been in the mood to shun the domestic hearth. Lady Dering is trying when one's nerves are not in the best condition. For the last eight hours she has been wildly hysterical."

"No wonder you show signs of strain," said Felix Dering, gazing down the chief of the sunny thoroughfares; he was scrutinising a low white villa, which basked in the July heat within a stone's throw of the iron cross that marked the junction of the ways.

Judith was consulting her own thoughts; abruptly she covered her pretty features with a fluttering handkerchief.

"It's—it's not altogether Lady Dering," she sobbed; "it's my—my brother; oh, Mr. Dering, I am in such trouble."

Felix was startled; he hated tears cordially, as do most of the sterner sex. "What have we friends for, Miss Garland," he said, cheerfully; "if not to aid us in our troubles? I may be able to help you; if so, you must count on me."

"He has written," faltered Judith, pathetically, "to say that he is in terrible straits for—for twenty pounds and—and Lady Dering, in her present mood, won't advance me a penny of my salary."

Her affectation of sisterly grief touched Felix Dering's chivalrous heart. He flushed with embarrassment. "Don't be offended, Miss Garland," he stammered; "but, do you know, I should be delighted to lend you that amount if—if you would accept it from me."

Judith shook her head. Much as she needed the sum—for Neal, as he had said, was bound to revenge himself if she should fail him—she was shrewd enough to hang back. "I am grateful, Mr. Dering," she answered; "very, very grateful; but I don't think I ought to—to—"

"To take a loan from me?" said Felix; "nonsense, you must let me give you a cheque and not worry yourself about any foolish conventionalities. You shall have it as soon as I reach the house, where Saladin is anxious to be. Now not another word, please."

He swung himself into the saddle and, with a frank salute, put the chestnut in motion. Judith watched him—through a mist of real tears.

"How I loathe myself for deceiving him," she muttered; "oh, I love you, Felix Dering, though you do not love me. And yet, I fancy I could teach you to."

She checked herself. A hundred yards past the stile

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Saladin had been reined in and once more Felix Dering had dismounted. He was not alone; someone in a muslin gown and a flapping Leghorn held the chestnut by the bridle and offered daintily to his twitching muzzle a lump of sugar. And Saladin's master had drawn very near to the charming minstrant.

Judith Garland pressed her gloved fingers to her side. "It is the little Carew girl," she muttered; "so Sir Christopher was right, Felix has thrown up his post, his allowance and the chance of a rich marriage, for the sake of a designing widow's bashful daughter. Felix, my friend, you are a bigger fool than I thought."

She crept from hedge to hedge till she could distinguish their voices.

"We shall not be able to enjoy many more of these stolen minutes with you—Saladin and I," Felix was saying tenderly; "I am to have my liberty, Esther, I am going out into the world to seek my fortune—the fortune that will permit me to claim you for my wife."

Esther Carew's delicate skin blanched and the sweet morsel she was offering to the chestnut rolled from her hand—Saladin bent his proud head reproachfully to pick it up.

"Oh, Felix!" she cried; "then Sir Christopher would not consent."

"To my wedding you?" finished her lover; "no, he proved obdurate. There were two or three moneyed maidens, he assured me, dying for a single glance of mine, in spite of the fact that his second marriage and the advent of my small cousin Brian have practically disinherited me. He tells me that if I enter into an alliance with one of the fair and moneyed damsels he will squeeze me out a few thousands. If not, I may say farewell to Wyresdale, and he will get a professional steward and farm-bailiff in my stead. Which person, I informed him, he might advertise for immediately. And, with that, we separated, and I rode into Duchester and instructed my banker to sell some stock I have. Don't be too grieved, dearest, I am going to—to British Columbia, to a mining chum out there."

Esther laid her arms against the chestnut's neck; she could not speak. Saladin turned to gaze at her in wonderment.

"Do not weep, my darling," besought Felix, huskily; "it's hard for both of us, but I'll be back soon, please Heaven, to take you over with me."

The shining curls lifted themselves, and a pair of blue eyes, wide and dewy, met those of Felix Dering.

"I will be brave," gasped Esther; "it seems so impossible—as if it couldn't be true. Oh, Felix, my darling!"

She was struggling with her misery, her bosom heaving, her hands clasped determinedly. Overcome, Felix plucked a hawthorn twig and stripped it mechanically of its leaves.

"I must run in," said Esther, controlling herself at length; "mother will be missing me, and I shall be better when I've had a quiet cry all to myself. Why did you ever grow fond of me, Felix, it has caused you nothing but unhappiness."

"Has it?" replied Felix, fondly; "you poor child, I would not be without my unhappiness—if you will call it so—for all the wealth of the—the Golden Dwarf."

He stooped, hidden by Saladin's tall withers, and kissed his betrothed. The gentle echo of that kiss stung Judith Garland to the quick. Biting her lip savagely, she retreated from the species of bower that had enabled her to spy upon the lovers, and hurried along the bye-path in the direction of Dering House, whose ivied turrets topped the crest of an intervening knoll.

Felix mounted his horse and, not daring to glance behind him, dashed into a gallop. Esther sank down on the grassy wayside, shaken by a storm of sorrow.

Suddenly there broke upon the air a succession of penetrating sounds, short and crisp, like a series of pistol-shots, and over the long red wall opposite her bounded the lithe yet clumsy body of a huge dog—one of those splendid, if ferocious, mongrels bred for sentinel duty. Seeing Esther, it commenced to bay loudly, plunging hither and thither in frantic and terrifying excitement. The girl screamed, and her persecutor redoubled its gigantic gambols.

Before Esther could repeat her shriek of fright, the wall had been scaled from within by a remarkable personage, who dropped, with much agility, into the road. The new arrival was a tiny being, less than four feet in stature, though perfectly proportioned and even handsome. He wore a stylish morning suit of tweed and a crush hat of the same material, and grasped a formidable whip, that indicated the origin of the piercing reports which had preceded the brute's excursion into the open.

The wielder of this article cracked threateningly its heavy and supple thong, but the boisterous animal, waxing angry, encountered him with dripping, defiant jaws. The other abandoned the whip, and flinging himself at the beast, clutched it by the throat. A brief contest ensued and the dog rolled to the ground, its tongue lolling out. Esther had risen, and made an amazed spectator of the combat.

The victor thrust the brute from him and, raising his hat, advanced to the bewildered girl.

"I am Otto Hare, at your service," he said bowing; "may I not know to whom I have the pleasure of speaking?"

Esther surveyed him, fascinated. This, then, was the Golden Dwarf, the wealthy recluse of Wyresdale Park, who, to escape the inquisitive glances of more ordinary mortals, had shut himself in his own ample domains—domains of whose mystery and grandeur the Wyresdale folk had so many and such conflicting versions. She scanned him covertly, feeling an indescribable alarm. Otto Hare's countenance was sombre and repellent, classic as was his profile and distinguished as were his bearing and manners. There was something in his cold, proud aspect that recalled the stern egotism of Napoleon.

"My name is Carew," responded Esther, shrinkingly.

"I trust you are not injured in any way," continued the Golden Dwarf, "by Cerberus here—he is a brute one should never retreat from. Had you merely walked towards him and struck him with your finger-tips, he would have fawned on you like a kitten. Come, sir!"

The dog crawled up, whimpering; Otto Hare teased it for an instant, and dismissed it with a haughty gesture and a grim smile. Crestfallen, Cerberus shambled from his tamer's vision.

"You are not the stranger to me you would suppose, Miss Carew," proceeded the Golden Dwarf, "I have often seen you from my watch-tower—it is beyond those trees, at this end of my park. I know that you reside at that white villa behind you, and I forced Cerberus to jump the wall that I might obtain the honour of your acquaintance. For the first time in fifteen years I find myself upon a public thoroughfare."

Esther shivered—he had stepped in front of her and was gazing intently into her face. A strident howl from Cerberus diverted his attention; the dog was disappearing down a dry ditch that flanked the irregular lane, almost concealed by the mass of trailing greenery depending from the luxuriant hedge-row. A moment later the brute emerged by Otto Hare, dividing the briars and nettles as it sought to climb out. Halting with its paws on the brink of the trench, it howled again.

"What ails the beast?" said the Golden Dwarf pettishly. He strode forward to ascertain, but reeled back, pale and tottering.

Esther looked and sickened at the sight. In the shallow ditch lay the corpse of a man—a well-dressed man with iron-grey hair and staring brown pupils. About his mouth

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and nose was tightly fastened a red cotton handkerchief. Upon his brow was a smear of clotted blood.

Esther Carew recoiled.

"It—it is Sir Christopher Dering!" she whispered.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN WITH ONE ARM.

"IT must have been robbery, Geddes, and highway robbery at that. Everyone says so, and Caleb Forester doesn't set himself up to be wiser than his neighbours. Why should you want any other reason—isn't robbery enough?"

The speaker's tone trembled fretfully, he had the stooping figure, ragged silver locks, and twitching, nervous limbs of age. At the moment he was taking snuff from a tiny black coffer, ornamented with flying swallows in mother-of-pearl. The operation concluded, he got out a voluminous handkerchief and flicked the dropped grains from the lapels of his velvet jacket.

"Maybe," was the quiet answer, delivered in a strong, if cultivated, Scotch accent, "and maybe not. You see, Mr. Forester——" here came a pause while the stopper of a glass phial, just withdrawn, after many attempts, from the socket, was tapped against that receptacle to separate the white crystals inside, "it isn't natural to conclude that a big man such as Sir Christopher, mounted on a powerful horse, should have been worsted by a tramp with a cudgel."

The old chemist made an irritable movement.

"You're too clever by half, Archibald Geddes," he told his assistant, "wasn't Sir Christopher discovered with a fracture in his skull and a folded handkerchief tied tightly over his mouth and nose? And wasn't his horse found running loose in a field, with the saddle and bridle hid under a hedge by the gate. The squire must have been attacked unexpectedly as he was riding home, stunned by the blow, dragged to the ground and smothered. It's highway robbery on the face of it—Sir Christopher's watch and money were gone."

Geddes weighed a proportion of the crystals he had been extracting from the phial, emptied them into a squat bottle, marked it, and began to parcel it up. He had labelled it "Poison."

"Had anyone a grudge against Sir Christopher?" he inquired, abstractedly.

Caleb Forester walked to the door of his shop and looked out into the principal street of Wyresdale. Its prim shops and houses basked in the morning sunlight, and its freshly-watered pavements were clean and cool.

"The squire hadn't an enemy in the world," he responded huskily—his back to Archibald Geddes.

The young Scotchman deposited in the shallow cupboard behind him the phial he had been using.

"Well, it's a queer business, Mr. Forester," he decided; "but I'll give you one piece of information you can depend upon. Sir Christopher was not mounted when he received that blow on the head which fractured his skull. No, nor was he standing either—he was lying down."

"It—it is Sir Christopher Dering!" she gasped.

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The chemist started.

"How—how do you make that out?" he faltered.

Geddes leaned on the counter and rubbed his chin reflectively.

"Because," he said, "Sir Christopher's skull was split from the nape of the neck to the top of the forehead. Ask any smart doctor—only we haven't one in Wyresdale—whether a fracture of that kind can be produced unless the patient's head is resting upon a firm support. Now, would a robber on foot have dragged the squire off his horse, have thrown him down, and then—and not till then—have stunned him with some blunt instrument. Supposing it all done however, why should he go on to commit murder as well as robbery?"

A species of shudder passed over Caleb Forester.

"He had to," murmured the chemist; "Sir Christopher would have been able to identify him."

"Not unless the moon was clear or the night scarcely fallen," persisted Geddes, obstinately; "there is only a single wretched lamp at the cross-roads. But granting that the double crime seemed necessary, why was the murderer careful to smother his victim? Surely strangling would have been the more probable method. Indeed, I can't believe myself that the handkerchief fastened over Sir Christopher's mouth and nostrils was capable of causing death by suffocation. It was just a common thin coloured one—like—like that you're carrying."

The chemist shrank away, stuffing into his pocket the bandanna pointed at by his assistant.

"You've got this murder on your brain, Geddes," he retorted feverishly; "let's change the subject—here's Connie."

Caleb Forester turned to meet his daughter—a graceful, brown-skinned girl with a shrewd, frank bearing.

"Your breakfast is waiting, father," she said brightly.

"Thank you, thank you, my dear," stammered Caleb; "I'll come in and get it." And he went unsteadily through the private door which led to the dwelling in the rear of the shop. Connie did not accompany him, but sought the shelter of the mahogany screen that concealed the dispensing-table. Archibald Geddes joined her casually.

"Good-morning, Mr. Geddes," observed Connie, interlacing her fingers in an embarrassed fashion.

"Good-morning, Miss Connie," said the assistant, endeavouring to possess himself of a firm, small palm.

Constance Forester evaded him with a reproving yet coquettish glance.

The Scotchman ignored his defeat diplomatically. "Mr. Forester's breakfast hour is nearer other folks lunch-time than ever, I'm thinking," he intimated grimly.

"Yes," admitted the girl, sighing, "he was out dreadfully late last night—discussing the murder, he told me, at the Wheatsheaf. He's growing worse and worse, Mr. Geddes."

"He's not growing any better, Miss Connie," was the reluctant answer; "but you mustn't lose heart; I'll keep the business together for you.' Archibald Geddes coughed diffidently. "You'll not mind my saying," he ventured, "how great a pleasure it is to me to be of any service to you—to your own self?"

Constance Forester blushed. "You're very thoughtful," she said, "and it is a comfort to know that somebody isn't in danger of being killed with the wrong physic when father is confused—to be honest, Mr. Geddes, when he's drunk."

At last Geddes captured and pressed sympathetically a warm little hand. Connie suffered him to retain it for a fraction of a minute before disengaging it. The Scotchman ruffled his curly hair.

"I had a serious trial yesterday, Miss Connie," he proceeded, "and that was to take my tea without you to pour it out for me. I am hoping to be spared that affliction this afternoon. The back-parlour isn't itself in your absence."

Connie laughed. But she was pleased, nevertheless.

"I am sorry, Mr. Geddes," she declared, "but really Esther—I mean Miss Carew—wanted me so badly, poor dear! To see that strange Mr. Hare and find Sir Christopher's dead body all in a breath was a bit upsetting. And Esther and I have been like sisters since we were babies; my mother was Mrs. Carew's nurse-maid till she married father."

Archibald Geddes wrinkled his brows.

"You know what is being said in the village?" he asked, "that Mr. Dering, Sir Christopher's nephew, quarrelled with his uncle on Miss Carew's account only the day before he was picked up dead. Both of them rode away from Dering House after the quarrel and neither returned the same night. In the morning—yesterday morning, that is—the squire was found murdered."

Connie Forester's pretty face became suddenly stern and cold.

"Mr. Geddes," she cried, "if you can repeat those cruel words or tell me that you believe what they might be made to mean, you are no friend of mine. So there!" And allowing him no opportunity to respond or explain, she disappeared into the house, very proud and disdainful.

The assistant spun sharply round—a convenient mirror, fixed at an angle, permitted him to see that a customer had entered the shop.

This was a sturdy fellow, of medium height, who boasted a slouch-hat, a suit of shabby indigo serge, a complexion the tint of leather, and a greasy bullet-head. At some period or other he had experienced the loss of an arm, the remains dangled from his left shoulder an empty sleeve. He progressed with a roll that might have been due to a sea-faring habit, or to that and intoxication. Geddes regained his usual position at the counter.

"Give me something to settle my internals, sonny," said the new-comer, roughly, "I've a touch of the malary hanging round me—a souveneer of the Brazils, which is a plaguey treacherous part of the world for climate, as you may have heard on. I've been splicing the mainbrace these two days and reckon I've caught a chill, though I've a rotten memory for what I do in my liquor."

Geddes began to mix a draught in a miniature tumbler with a frosted measurement-scale on the side.

"Say," broke out his uncouth patron; "how long is it since Caleb got the number of his mess—passed in his checks, died, savvy?"

The Scotchman handed over the fragile vessel; it was clutched in a knotted fist and drained in a twinkling.

"Mr. Forester is still alive," replied Geddes, solemnly, scrutinising the square frame and notable breadth of the drinker.

"Oh, is he?" queried the one-armed man, relinquishing the delicate goblet; "then you can tip him the wink that Nick Foley has been clipped of a fin and is ashore for good. He'll remember me, will Caleb Jehoshophat, to think that he's been stewing in this flypot of a village, peddling salts and senna, while Nicholas Foley has been sailing the stormy sea, North, South, East and West"—he waved his fist to each quarter of the compass as he mentioned it, then interrupted himself. "The world's a rum place," he added with a fierce scowl, "but we've no call to argue about it—least said, soonest mended."

He flung half-a-crown on the rubber cash-pad, collected his change and made for the street. He had not reached it when the threshold of Caleb Forester's shop was crossed by an exceedingly tall and rather stout person, in a flapping frock-coat, baggy trousers, and a soft hat of black straw. The most recent arrival had a strikingly arched nose, a clean-shaven, smiling mouth, close cropped-hair and yellow eyes, fenced with glittering spectacles.

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At sight of this singular apparition Nicholas Foley dodged, shook his bullet-head, and retreated, blinking incredulously. But he did not continue his exit, instead, he slunk into a recess formed by a projecting stack of shelves, from which he peered forth, surveying, with a peculiar anxiety, the bulky frame in its ample vestments.

"Morning again, Professor," remarked Archibald Geddes, upon whom the conduct of the one-armed sailor had not been wasted; "I worked the stopper out at last—it hadn't been touched for six months."

He unfastened the cupboard at his back and produced the packet he had wrapped up during his conversation with Caleb Forester.

"Half an ounce, sir," he said; "I have only kept a grain or two in case it should be wanted. But it isn't often prescribed in Wyresdale."

"And the price?" demanded the other, laconically.

His pronounciation of the final word revealed his origin—he was a German.

"Fifteen shillings," was the rejoinder.

"It is very dear," grumbled the other, but he paid the amount.

Geddes laid a book upon the counter, opened at a ruled page. He had filled in certain of the blanks—they recorded the date and stated that half an ounce of hydrochlorate of cocaine had been sold by Archibald Geddes to—the space for the name of the purchaser was unoccupied. The German took the offered pen and wrote, "Joseph Kraft, M.D. Brux, Wyresdale Park." Stowing away the package, he nodded curtly to the assistant and took a leisurely exit.

The sailor leapt to the threshold and gazed after him. Then he strode to the counter, where Geddes was putting back the poison-register.

"Who was that?" he desired excitedly.

The young Scotchman answered drily:

"That is no ordinary person," he said; "it is Professor Kraft, Mr. Otto Hare's own particular resident doctor, and a famous specialist, we're assured, on the Continent. If you know Wyresdale you know who Mr. Otto Hare is. Well, Professor Kraft lives with Mr. Hare at Wyresdale Park and he's done now, oh, a year or more. And some very uncanny drugs he finds occasion for," reflected the assistant to himself in an undertone; "he has enough cocaine there now to kill twenty men."

Nicholas Foley had been devoting but slight attention to the latter section of the Scotchman's explanation. He whistled shrilly, slapped his thigh with his horny palm and vanished out of the shop. Geddes hurried to the entrance, ostensibly to lower the sun-blind, in reality to glance after the one-armed man. He was trotting along the High street—in the wake of Professor Kraft, the mysterious resident physician to Mr. Otto Hare, of Wyresdale Park, otherwis the Golden Dwarf.

They had travelled—pursuer and pursued—beyond the limits of the young Scotchman's vision, out of the High Street itself, and into the deserted roads at the end of the village, before the sailor, quickening his pace, drew level with the German and tapped him on the shoulder. The Professor turned; nothing in his sleek countenance betrayed the least recognition of the man who had accosted him.

Nicholas Foley sneered. "Come on, Dutchy!" he cried, bullyingly; "if you don't remember me you ought to. Why, I was on the *Simla* when you ran that rummy cargo of yours. You're fatter, Dutchy, but you're the same man."

Not a muscle stirred in the German's face. He studied the sailor with his dull yellow eyes, veiled by the gleaming lenses of his spectacles.

"You always puzzled me above a bit, Dutchy," he was told; "see here, it can't do any harm now. What was your little game? Guns I can savvy, *and* grog, but what the dickens did you want with them there?—ha, ha!" And Nicholas Foley collapsed in a paroxysm of mirth. A troubled light showed itself transiently in the German's eyes.

"On the cross it was, somehow, Dutchy," said the sailor; "that much I figured out long ago, and seeing you in the physic shop so spick and span, made me wonder what it would be worth to remind you of it. You yourself," he added, significantly, "and no one else."

The German parted his smiling lips. "You are mistaken, my good friend," he answered; "I have never seen you before. But even if we were the best of acquaintances it would not be prudent to remind me of anything I greatly wished to forget. Should you meet the gentleman whom I evidently resemble, and to whom your extremely interesting conversation refers, I should not advise you to molest him, either. He might be tempted to give you in charge to the local police, who, at present, owing to an atrocious murder having taken place in the neighbourhood, are taking much interest in suspicious characters."

As he uttered this final sentence, the smile died from his features, and they distorted into so vicious an expression that Nicholas Foley recoiled. The Professor walked on resuming in an instant his former bland demeanour.

"Curse him!" hissed the sailor, "he'd have me swung if he could. The tricky land-pirate! I might have known he wouldn't heave-to for a shot across his bows. But, by the living jingo, I'll get to wind'ard of him and have a squint at his papers."

He began, with considerable skill, to track the large, stout form of the German, who was entering an iron wicket in the interminable wall that skirted the road. The sailor waited until this entrance had been closed, then he scaled it nimbly and continued his chase.

Behind the wall was a belt of lofty trees, past them a stretch of meadow, rising to a substantial hill, through whose green summit broke irregularly the grey limestone of the district. The slope of this huge eminence bore a massive and unfamiliar type of structure, rectangular and embattled like a fort, but with a single wide tower. Into a door at the base of the latter the German was just disappearing.

Nicholas Foley scratched his head.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he muttered, "I'll bet that's new since I left Wyresdale. What can Dutchy be up to? And what has he to do with Otto Hare?"

While he gazed, a deep bark fell upon his ear. Over the meadow, escorted by the ferocious mongrel which had so alarmed Esther Carew, was strolling a tiny figure—the figure of the Golden Dwarf. The dog, awakened to the presence of the sailor, was bounding towards him with gigantic strides; Kraft, recalled by the brute's clamour, had just stepped forth again into the open.

Nicholas Foley whipped out a clasp-knife, opened it with his teeth, and, as the creature—trained to show no mercy to trespassers—hurled itself at his throat, he fell on one knee and buried the blade in its abdomen. The animal rolled over, writhing. Springing to his feet, the sailor fled like the wind. Nor did he pause until he was outside the perilous limits of Wyresdale Park.

This done, he proved to be not far from the cross-roads, and struck at once down the narrowest of the converging lanes. As he scudded between its dense hedgerows, he espied a ruinous thatched cottage, fronted by a strip of neglected garden. Nicholas Foley shifted his course, ran up to the battered door, which was flanked by shuttered windows, and, lifting his heel, drove in the lock. Another second and he was safe from observation.

Not before night had descended upon Wyresdale did he venture to leave his hiding-place. Then, very cautiously, he let himself out and stole athwart the fields, prowling like a lean wolf. He was maddeningly hungry.

The sailor was about to force his way through a hawthorn fence on to a dusky footpath when a voice arrested him. It was a man's voice, subdued but distinct, and it said:

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"You're a marvel, Judith—that is, if the cheque is in order, a question I'll settle in a jiffey." There was the spurt of a match and a faint glow behind the hedge. "Felix Dering—twenty pounds to bearer—yesterday's date," read the speaker. "All correct," he went on, "and now, I'll be off. Bye-bye; thanks for the cash."

"Stay," answered a woman's quiet tones, "Neal Garland, what do you know of the murder of Sir Christopher Dering?"

CHAPTER III.

"MR. OTTO HARE."

As the name was uttered a door swung to behind the singular figure of the Golden Dwarf.

He stood in a pleasant, low-ceiled apartment, through whose large windows might have been perceived the green hedges and dusty macadam of the cross-roads.

Nearer still, was visible a pair of magnificent roan cobs, harnessed to a four-wheeled, hooded vehicle, and fretting at the way-side in charge of a groom.

Their owner, Mr. Otto Hare, had just entered the drawing room of the white villa.

A woman rose to greet him—a woman with raven tresses, a sallow complexion, vigilant dark eyes, and the thin, restless lips of selfish middle-age.

She had been reading; her book lay on the gipsy table by her bent-wood rocking-chair.

"I trust you will forgive this unceremonious visit from a stranger," said the Golden Dwarf, bowing; "but I felt anxious to assure myself that Miss Carew had not suffered as the result of a shock, for which, I fear, I was, in a measure, responsible. Believe me, I am most grieved that so charming a young lady should have been inadvertently brought into contact with such an awful event."

An odd expression flashed into Mrs. Carew's astute countenance; she looked at him—covertly, but searchingly. It was the first occasion upon which any matron in Wyresdale had been able to scrutinise the small, saturnine features of its richest resident.

"You must not do yourself an injustice, Mr. Hare," she answered; "dear Esther had only herself to blame; she wanders about far too freely and I am in constant dread of something terrible happening to her. She is so dreamy and romantic! But pray be seated."

The Golden Dwarf chose out the least elevated of the settees around him and sank among its cushions—a strange figure, athletic though diminutive, stunted yet graceful. His hostess resumed her position in the rocking-chair.

"Do not blame Miss Carew," protested Otto Hare, lightly, "for a habit which has procured me the honour of her, and of your, acquaintance."

"The privilege is ours," replied Mrs. Carew. There was a sort of suppressed excitement in her voice; she was keenly awake to the envy which the news of the Golden Dwarf's call at the white villa would kindle in the breasts of her social rivals. Henceforth, Mrs. Carew of the "Rosery" would be a personage in Wyresdale.

Otto Hare shrugged his shoulders. "It is very good of you to believe so," he said, answering her polite protest; "I am a man, Mrs. Carew, who can boast of few friends, and who, indeed, has rather desired to escape friendship than to seek it. For fifteen years I have not passed my own park-wall."

The piercing orbs under the smooth brow of Mrs. Carew were illuminated by a faint smile.

"You have been a determined recluse, truly," she yielded; "and a ghastly affair it is which has brought you out into the world again. It was most thoughtful of you to send Esther in at once on that distressing morning when Sir Christopher was found!"

The Golden Dwarf sighed. "Poor Dering!" he rejoined; "I was one of the last to meet him alive."

"You!" queried Mrs. Carew, incredulously.

"Yes," said Otto Hare: "For several years now he has played a weekly bout of chess with me. We originally interviewed one another over a boundary dispute that our lawyers could not settle—the Dering lands march with mine—and I found him a genial fellow, though a trifle choleric. A fiercely-contested game absorbed us both on what was, apparently, the night of his death, and he only left Wyresdale Park in time, as he admitted, to be late for dinner."

"How inexplicable the whole occurrence seems!" observed Mrs. Carew, yawning; "I shall be glad when everything is over and done with. The inquiry does not begin till to-morrow."

The Golden Dwarf stroked a corner of his firm mouth. "It is not improbable, I gather," he pursued, "that we may be treated to some extremely sensational developments."

His hostess leaned forward in her swaying lounge. "You don't mean that there is a clue to the robber!" she cried.

Otto Hare indulged in a cynical grimace.

"The robber, dear Mrs. Carew!" he said; "yours is scarcely the accepted theory. The crime, according to the gossips, is wilful murder!"

"But who *can* have wished to murder Sir Christopher?" was the astonished retort.

"Anybody might who had quarrelled with him seriously," asserted the Golden Dwarf; "Dering could be irritable and obstinate to a degree. My friend, Dr. Kraft, who is my newsmonger, tells me there is talk of a grave breach having taken place (only a few hours before his death) between Sir Christopher and—but I am on the point of being indiscreet. The gentleman may be a friend of yours."

Mrs. Carew's sallow skin flushed with impatience. "Oh, do satisfy my curiosity," she pleaded, "a breach between Sir Christopher and—whom?"

Otto Hare lowered his polished tones to a malicious whisper.

"Mr. Felix Dering!" he concluded.

His hostess gasped. "You amaze me," she murmured; "surely you are misinformed."

"Dr. Kraft is never misinformed," persisted the Golden Dwarf, calmly. "Wyresdale is ringing with the rumour. It is even explained that the quarrel related to a young lady with whom Mr. Dering is supposed to be smitten. And now I recollect," he hesitated, affecting an air of embarrassment, "her name was—Mrs. Carew, how can I apologise sufficiently to you and to your daughter?"

Mrs. Carew shot a quick glance at the speaker, she fancied she could detect his motive in what she guessed to be an adroit piece of acting. He must be anxious to discover her attitude towards Felix Dering's interest in Esther, her intuition was confirmed that he—the millionaire proprietor of Wyresdale Park—had been attracted by her daughter.

"You owe us no apology, Mr. Hare," she said, with a tact equal to his own; "Mr. Dering is but superficially known to Esther and I. Gossip exaggerates so absurdly! No, Esther is not the girl to bestow her heart against my advice, and I could never consent to her marrying Mr. Dering. Why, he has been no better than Sir Christopher's steward since the birth of the second Lady Dering's little son, Brian. In any case, this dreadful allegation to which you refer——"

The Golden Dwarf sprang to his feet. "*S-s-h!* here is Miss Carew," he said warningly, and moved to the short flight of broad steps which led from the conservatory to the rear of the apartment. Upon the carpeted stair Esther had paused, gazing at the unexpected visitor in a species of affright. The sunshine from the arched roof of glass at her

Read "The Golden Dwarf."

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back streamed down upon her, glistening in her fair curls and making her muslin gown like silk.

Otto Hare had taken an impetuous stride in the direction of this pretty picture.

"Esther," said his hostess, "this is Mr. Hare, whom you saw the other day. He has very kindly called to ask after you."

Esther Carew moved reluctantly down the steps. The radiance faded from her as she glided into the shadow of the drawing-room and approached the tiny form of the Golden Dwarf.

"I wished, Miss Carew," continued Otto Hare, "to express my regret that I should have been the means of associating you, however slightly, with a certain melancholy affair. Cerberus has had cause to repent his impulsive nature—he will leap no more walls and inspect no more ditches."

"You—you have killed him!" stammered the girl, recoiling.

The Golden Dwarf made a gesture of protest; his features grew suddenly harsh and menacing. "It was not I," he responded, "nor was it by my leave. Enough that the brute has expiated his fault."

"Why should it have been a fault," said Esther surprised, "to show us where Sir Christopher was?" Her sweet voice broke.

"When I think of that awful moment," she faltered, "everything starts up before me and I see him again, lying there so frightfully straight and quiet, with the handkerchief fastened over his mouth, and the blood on his forehead."

She put her soft palms to her delicate, horror-stricken face. Her emotion infected Otto Hare, and he shuddered.

"I remind you of a painful episode, Miss Carew," he told her nervously. "That is my misfortune. I shall hope, in the immediate future, to create some happier connections between us. Do not deny me, I beg, the necessary opportunities."

He picked his crush hat from the settee.

"Mrs. Carew," he said, "I can only bring myself to say *au revoir*; Miss Carew, I am your humble servant."

The Golden Dwarf took his somewhat abrupt departure with well-bred ease. The elder woman stole to the window, and watched him as he was whirled off in his dashing "spider" phaeton behind the spirited cobs. He was driving himself, the reins tense in his small fingers, the fleet creatures chafing at his iron grasp.

Mrs. Carew went back to her daughter, and drew her into an affectionate embrace.

"You lucky, lucky girl," she cried, "there goes the wealthiest bachelor in Derbyshire, and he has taken a fancy to you."

Esther gazed at her mother—astounded, yet indefinably alarmed.

"Of course, he is exceptionally short," proceeded Mrs. Carew, regaining her seat and rocking lazily, "but very handsome, and with delightful manners. He cannot have less than fifty thousand a year, and most of it will have accumulated, though he is reputed to spend untold sums on the park. Play your cards as I bid you, and you shall be its mistress."

The listener shrank away, trembling.

"Mamma," she exclaimed, "you don't imagine——! Oh, I couldn't care for that man; it is ridiculous!"

She burst into a peal of hysterical laughter.

"And yet," she added, checking herself, "he frightens me, for all he is so little—his eyes are cruel and his mouth, when he is angry, sets like a vice. If you had only seen him conquer that dog of his the day we found Sir Christopher!"

Mrs. Carew got up, smilingly. "My dear child," she said, "we women end by liking a strong character. And then, fifty thousand a year!—what personal peculiarities would not such a consideration outweigh?"

Esther faced her mother bravely. "It is not right," she urged, "to assume that Mr. Hare wishes to marry me just because he has called and been inquisitive. But even if he does, I—I love Felix—Mr. Dering."

"Let us hear no more of Mr. Dering," commanded Mrs. Carew, with a frown. "Luckily, I refused to sanction any engagement on the score of your youth. It was prudent, I admit, not to repulse him, so long as Brian Dering was a mere baby and he might possibly become heir to his uncle's property. Mr. Hare is evidently aware of his attentions to you, and, most correctly, probed me on the subject, I answered that Mr. Dering was a superficial acquaintance and had no claim upon you whatever."

"Mamma!" cried Esther, "you did not—you could not!"

"I did," insisted Mrs. Carew, "and very wisely. Have you heard that Mr. Dering is actually suspected of Sir Christopher's murder. Wyresdale is ringing with it. They had quarrelled desperately the day before Sir Christopher's body was discovered."

Her daughter grew pale and rigid—the pallor and the rigidity of the lily. "You know I love Felix, mamma!" she faltered; "and you can ask me to desert him at such a moment! Besides, he is innocent, he can prove it; he was in Duchester the whole of that night."

"In our sphere of life, my dear Esther," was the reply, "a criminal accusation is as bad as a conviction. You understand my wishes; it is too hot to argue. Really August gets more and more trying, I must put on a tea-gown or melt Be a good girl, Esther, and when you next pass Mr. Dering, restrict yourself to a cool bow."

And with this heartless counsel Mrs. Carew's spare, elastic form and selfish countenance vanished from the drawing-room.

Esther crossed unsteadily to one of the French windows, released the hasp, stepped out into the garden, and traversed the lawn to a sheltered nook, shut in by tall bushes and boasting an ancient rustic bench, much battered and verdant with moss.

Here she flung herself down, buried her head upon her arms, and began to weep convulsively. A thrush in the neighbouring coppice sang on as if to mock her unhappiness. The sun was westering fast, and his yellow beams pierced a row of poplars to fall caressingly on her quivering figure.

The crisp sound of a horse's canter roused her from her abandonment of grief.

"That is Saladin!" she said, and, mounting the bench, peered over the hedge. It was, indeed, the chestnut, that, with Felix Dering in the saddle, was rapidly nearing the cross-roads.

Felix's glance, lingering affectionately upon the white villa, perceived the fair and fluttering curls of Esther Carew, and spurring to the way-side, he alighted. Tethering Saladin to the bough of a convenient poplar, he crushed through the hedge, and seized in a tender clasp the owner of the curls aforesaid.

"My darling," he murmured, kissing her fondly; "I did not dare to hope for a sight of you—what fairy whispered that I was riding by? But you have been shedding tears; how is this?"

Esther choked back a sob.

"It is nothing," she replied; "mamma hurt me and I came to have my cry out alone."

Felix Dering took her hands in his, his face was very grave yet gentle.

"Tell me," he desired; "how did Mrs. Carew wound you? I have a reason for asking. Was it anything to do with—with me?"

The girl shuddered.

"Yes," she admitted; "it was about Sir Christopher—

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and—and you. She said people in Wyresdale were talking of the quarrel you had had with your uncle before he—he was found."

"What else did she say?" inquired Felix sombrely.

"That—that you were being suspected," pursued Esther. "Oh, Felix, my darling, I can't repeat it, I can't. But I told her you had been at Duchester the whole of that night and you could prove yourself innocent. If I had not been able to say it I should have died."

Felix Dering winced and devoted himself to striking with his hunting-crop at the undergrowth of the hedge.

"And Mr. Hare called," added Esther, noticing with wonderment her lover's curious absorption. "I am sure it was he who told mamma what was being said in Wyresdale. She believes he has taken a fancy to me and insists that henceforth I must only bow to you. What shall we do?"

"Otto Hare has taken a fancy to you!" exclaimed Felix, aghast. "But your mother, she could not sell you to that man; it is incredible!"

"He is rich," rejoined Esther sadly; "mamma is very ambitious; she frightens me sometimes, as Mr. Hare did when I studied his face this afternoon. They will both have their own way, no matter what it costs. Felix, why did you ever love me? I shall bring you nothing but ill-luck; it was my fault you quarrelled with your uncle, my fault you are suspected of being——"

She did not finish the sentence, a call from the house had interrupted her.

"Miss Esther!" came a shrill summons.

"It is one of the maids," said Esther hastily; "mamma must want me. Good-bye, Felix, I love you—if all the world turned against you I would go on loving and believing in you."

Felix caught her to his breast and held her there for an instant. Then she broke from him and hurried off. There were tears upon Felix Dering's brown cheeks. Men who would have galloped dry-eyed with the Light Brigade will falter and grow weak as they look into the sacred deeps of a woman's love and self-sacrifice.

Brushing away the tell-tale moisture from his cheeks, Felix slipped through the hedge, mounted his horse and rode towards Dering House. The gallant animal between his knees knew, in the instinctive fashion of his race, that all was not well with his master. Once or twice he snorted and turned his intelligent muzzle, as if to inquire the reason for Felix Dering's slack hand and nerveless seat.

But Saladin got no answer and cantered on, till, in the fall of the July day, the chestnut came in sight of the ivied turrets and quaint facade of Dering House. Felix walked him to the stables and then, with a gloomy stride, entered the corridor that led to the great hall of the old mansion.

As he gained the lofty apartment from whose walls the portraits of gay and gallant Derings gazed at him amidst serried rows of bygone weapons and the antlers of historic stags, there hastened across it a beautiful boy, with an aristocratic profile, fragile limbs, and sunny locks. The resemblance between the twentieth-century child, in his velvet suit and lace collar, and the painted faces about the hall, marked him for a Dering.

"It *is* cousin Felix!" he cried in a clear treble, "I knew he would come back."

"Why should I not have come back, Brian?" demanded Felix Dering, lifting the lad to his shoulder.

Brian shook his head.

"I said you would," he assented, "but I heard Peters and Jane say that you mightn't. Cousin Felix, you haven't taken father from me, have you?"

A flood of passionate despair surged into the veins of Felix Dering. So rumour was already rife at Dering House!

"No, no, Brian," he said sorrowfully, "and if it would bring him to you again, I would go away myself with a glad heart."

He covered his face, the pang of the childish query had been too bitter.

Brian put his arms about the neck of his favourite play mate.

"Don't cry, cousin Felix," he begged; "we will go and look for father and fetch him home to mother. She has been crying all day."

A groan burst from the bosom of Felix Dering, and he set the boy down.

"Run and see the big round sun, Brian dear," interposed a quiet voice. Judith Garland had reached their side unnoticed. She returned Felix Dering's glance with an almost scornful scrutiny. The child, interested by the suggestion, went to a narrow pane that focussed the perspective of the avenue, at whose extremity the early tints of the sunset were suffusing the West.

"Your resolve is a wise one, Mr. Dering," said Judith Garland under her breath.

"What resolve?" asked Felix, miserably.

"To see it through," replied the other; "it is the only plan, especially for the guilty."

"Miss Garland!" exclaimed Felix Dering.

Judith smiled. "Trust me or not, as you choose," she said; "but first let me show you something."

She held out her palm; it contained half-a-dozen golden links, evidently the fragments of a chain. They were smeared with a brownish substance.

"That," she told him, "is a piece of your watch-guard, blood-stained, and picked up near the scene of Sir Christopher's death—the pattern is peculiar and easily identified. You are wearing the remainder, clumsily mended. One moment, I have not finished. You say you stopped in Duchester that night; it is false—you were seen near the cross-roads, about ten o'clock. Mr. Dering, your life is in my hands. Fortunately, I am your friend. Silence!" she added, as he parted his lips to respond to this amazing declaration; "we are no longer alone."

Her warning was correct; the bell of the hall-door had been rung loudly, and a footman was proceeding to answer it. The child Brian came to peep at the visitor.

As the footman opened, a stern, official figure stepped within—his blue and braided uniform, his smart cap and looped belt, declared him an inspector of police. Felix Dering staggered—was he dreaming, the prey of some hideous nightmare?

A caution sounded in his ear; Judith Garland was speaking to him.

"Don't look like that," she whispered; "pull yourself together!"

(To be continued next Tuesday.)

Don't Forget!

The design on the cover of the July

"ROYAL"

is Orange.

And the contents have never been excelled.

Read "The Golden Dwarf."

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Our Brilliant Failure.

By the late HENRY J. BYRON.

Author of "Our Boys," and many other famous Comedies.

READER, my name is Coodler. Having unbosomed myself to this extent, I need have no compunction in adding that I have a wife, a family of two interesting children, a snug business. I am not fat, I am only comfortable; my angles are pleasantly rounded, and I haven't a wrinkle on my chubby countenance. I am of a good temper—my wife once called it seraphic, but since my recent visit to the seaside I am afraid she has not been able to apply that extravagant term with the same consciousness of its correct significance as before we—but there, I mustn't anticipate.

Immersed in business from ten till five, it is not to be wondered at that I look forward to my annual holiday with, if I may be allowed the expression, my mental mouth watering. I am quite aware that there is no such thing as a mental mouth, though why there should not be, when we have Shakespeare's authority for the existence of a "mind's eye" I can't say. But I never had a great opinion of poets. I have had one or two on my books before now, and they are not punctual in their payments—far from it. Well, as I was saying, when the weather begins to grow warm I find my place of business insupportable. I soon begin to grow warm myself, and a very small amount of sunshine and exertion overcomes me.

My wife is something of the same temperament, and she also longs annually for the seaside; for we don't consider a mere visit to the country an "out." We like fields, and hedges, and cows, and all that sort of thing, but we can have all that if we drive to Richmond or Epping Forest. What we want is a sniff of the briny, the bracing salt air, the clammy sticky atmosphere, that makes you feel uncomfortable and happy. I am vulgar in my tastes and delight in Margate. Some people say that they like to go to the seaside for quiet. Very good; let'em go. I prefer noise. I hate quiet.

I like niggers. I like Punch. I like the Jetty; and as for your Esplanades and dulness at your fashionable places, they are not in my way, and that's the honest truth.

Now, in her heart my wife delights in Margate too. Why, we went there when we were courting, and so the place has a sort of charm for both of us.

But when I suggested Margate this year, you should have seen the expression on my wife's face. It was grand. I knew what it meant. We've lately grown acquainted with Mrs. Mackintosh of —— Square, and a very genteel lady she is, and mighty grand notions she's imbued my wife with—horror of Margate being one of them.

"Mrs. Mackintosh tells me that Margate is unbearable this season; such a set of people!" said Mrs. Coodler to me when I mentioned my favourite haunt.

"Bother the people!" I replied; "I suppose you want Brighton with the sun in your eyes all day, and everybody dressed as if they were going into the parks."

"O, dear no!" said my wife, with a toss of the head; "it's not the season at Brighton yet."

Pretty changes had taken place in my wife's notions since Mrs. Mackintosh made her acquaintance. She never used to lay such stress on its being the season; in fact, she was rather partial to the earlier portion of the summer or the autumn, lodgings being cheaper at these times. Well, from Brighton I went through all the seaside places I could think of; but Mrs. Coodler had an objection to them all. I began at last to have serious fears that we should miss our seaside out altogether, for Mrs. Mackintosh had something to say against every place. My wife determined to go nowhere "out of season;" so really our choice was limited, as those places whose seasons fell late in the year were out of the question. I must take my six weeks in the summer, you see, and so the Isle of Thanet being shut against us (for Ramsgate shared the Mackintosh denunciation, and Broadstairs I kicked at myself), I began to feel uncomfortable. I at one time imagined that Mrs. Coodler was about to propose Boulogne, in order to come back with a foreign flavour; but she can't even go to Kew by the boat without being ill for the day; and as my opinion of Frenchmen—well, there, if you want to get my back up, mention 'em, that's all.

As luck would have it, Mrs. Mackintosh's mother fell very ill about this time, and the genteel friend had to go abroad, which was a great relief to me; for of all the women I ever knew, she—but there, I say nothing, she's in a foreign land, poor thing, and I can only pity her.

She had gone, it is true, but the genteel viper we had been nourishing in the family bosom had left its sting.

She had recommended Mudville. At present you are, of course, by no means impressed by the enormity of recommending Mudville. You don't know Mudville, never heard of Mudville, and will probably not find Mudville in the map. But wait. Hear more, and, I was going to add, avoid Mudville; but that advice would be superfluous; for a description of my visit to and my treat at that den of—but there, again, you'll excuse me, I'm sure, when you have read a few pages further.

We were sitting at tea—a social meal in which I delight—nobody ever quarrels over tea; it's far beyond dinner in my opinion. We were seated at tea, Mrs. Coodler, myself and Grimley, an old friend. Grimley has a disagreeable knack of making himself universally unpleasant. Were it not for this, he would be a very nice fellow. He is what

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they call a rough diamond, and takes a pleasure in being rude; but as I say, it's his only drawback.

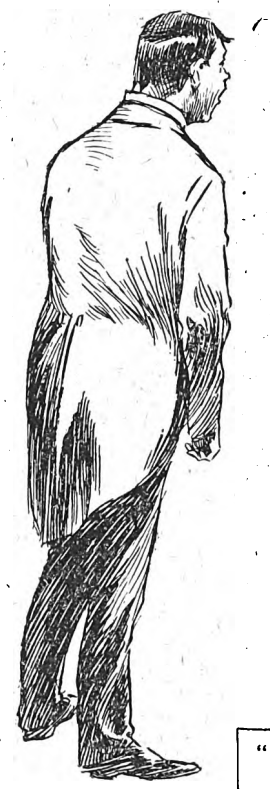
"Pass the buttered toast, Grimley," I said with a smile, for I was in a good temper, and was eating more than was prudent.

"Sooner keep you for a day than a week," replied the diamond, with his mouth full of muffin.

My wife threw a glance at Grimley that would have annihilated many men, but he didn't notice it.

"You go in for tea as if you were at the seaside," remarked Grimley, after a pause.

Disagreeable as was the remark, I was grateful to my friend for making it, for I had been longing to touch upon the subject of our summer tour, and hadn't known how to approach it. My wife brightened up, too, and left off looking black, a thing she always does when Grimley comes. I can't say why, but women are queer creatures, and Mrs. Coodler is no exception to the rule.



"Wish I was at the seaside!" I exclaimed, throwing a side-glance at my wife.

"Ah, indeed!" sighed Mrs. C.

"Why don't you go, then?" grunted our agreeable friend.

"That's just it," I replied hurriedly; "why don't we, eh, Jane?"

Jane didn't know, she was sure. For her part, she was ready to go to-morrow.

"Margate again, I suppose," sneered Grimley; he had a dreadful habit of sneering — all rough diamonds have.

"Margate indeed!" said my wife, with a toss of her head. "O dear, no! no more of your Margates;" then, after a pause, she added with most irritating emphasis, "nor your Ramsgates."

Now this was quite uncalled-for, as we had never stayed at Ramsgate, nor had I suggested that we should.

Grimley had always abused Margate. Now, however, he espoused the cause of that charming place and praised it beyond measure.

"Got too grand for Margate, I suppose, Coodler," he observed, taking another cup of tea—his third.

"No I haven't," I replied indignantly. "Give me Margate before all the watering-places in England, aye, or Wales either, if you come to that;" and I brushed the crumbs off my shirt-front with an indignant sweep of my hand, for I was (though seraphic) beginning to get a little put out.

"Margate's low," jerked out my wife with a scowl.

"Too many tradespeople, I suppose," sneered the rough diamond with a maddening grin.

"Well I won't go," said my wife, bringing down her fist (positively her fist) upon the table, and making the cups and saucers rattle again.

"Go abroad, ma'am," put in Grimley; "there's lots of pretty places in Switzerland."

The puppy! Because he had once been down the Rhine with Mr. Cook's party.

"Oh, sir," she blurted forth, making a sharp bob, "asking your parding, but is Mrs. Coodler to cook your mealses, or am I to do 'em. I merely wish to know, to save confusion for the future."

"Or America," he continued, with that horrible smile of his; "there's all sorts of goings on there now."

"O, rubbish!" I exclaimed, wishing to cover her ignorance, "none of your chaff, Grimley, for it's not required. I shall stay at home, unless it's settled very soon."

This frightened Mrs. Coodler, I can tell you. She turned pale. I saw the change distinctly—she turned *very* pale, and gasped out rather than spoke the following:

"Mrs. Mackintosh has told me of a delightful place on the—coast; a lovely spot, which is hardly known

Read "The Golden Dwarf."

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yet; a wonderful place for children, and very, *very* genteel."

Reader, a word in your ear. Whenever you hear of a spot being described as a "wonderful place for children," avoid it. Remember you are not a child, and go somewhere else.

"And what's the name of it, my dear?" I asked.

"Mudville," replied my wife, with a side-look at Grimley, for she suspected he would make one of his vulgar, satirical remarks upon it.

"Well," he said, as I knew he would, "it sounds very pretty; quite inviting, I may say;" and he chuckled. He had a peculiar chuckle, something like the laugh of the hyæna, only more horrible.

I felt bound to rush to the rescue.

"I have no doubt that if Mrs. Mackintosh says it's nice, it is nice," I observed.

My wife gave me a grateful squeeze of the hand under the table, which brought the tears into my eyes; for she is a muscular woman, though short in stature.

"Has she ever been there, mum?" asked Grimley.

"No, she hasn't," replied Mrs. C. snappishly; "but she's friends who have, and I can trust her."

"Ah! can Coodler? that's the thing," said Grimley, with a twinkle in his evil eye.

This was a sly dig at my business, a subject on which I allow no man to joke. I drew myself up. I am not tall, but even my enemies admit that I am dignified. I drew myself up, and placing my thumbs in my waistcoat-holes, and my head back—my favourite position when desirous of being impressive—I thus addressed the satirical Grimley:

"Grimley, you are an old friend. As the poet says, 'We were boys together'; but I will not allow you, Grimley, to throw my shop in my teeth in the presence of the gentler sex. Don't do it again, Grimley, because I don't like it."

Then, turning to my wife, I said, with a sudden transition of manner from the imperially severe to the domestically gentle, "My love, we go to Mudville on Monday."

* * * * *

Going to Mudville, and getting there, are, I beg to state, two very different matters. The spirit may be willing, but the railway arrangements are worse than weak, the train putting you down at a very considerable distance from your destination.

We started—self and wife, my son Christopher, aged nine, my nurse Sarah Naggles (estimable, but warm-tempered), and my infant Roderick—from the station after breakfast, and the train put us down at Muffborough, and left us looking disconsolately at our boxes on the platform, and wondering whether we should get a fly, for we were some miles from Mudville, and we'd a good deal of luggage—we always have. We didn't wonder long. The Interesting Stranger soon ferreted out a fly, and a pretty specimen of a fly it was.

But first, touching the Interesting Stranger. He was a remarkably good-looking person, that is, for those who admire tall people—I don't; little and good's my motto. He had a slight tendency of blood to the nose, but, as my wife remarked, that might be constitutional. He had a heavy moustache, and parted his hair down the middle (an idiotic fashion), and he wore his seaside hat in a jaunty manner, and was altogether rollicking, and perhaps a trifle vagabondish-looking.

However, I never judge a man by his appearance, and I must admit he was very polite. He talked politics to me, for he got into the same carriage with us as we were starting, hoping he didn't inconvenience us, and not shying the least bit at the baby. He handed my wife the paper, he snapped his fingers at Roderick, and threw Christopher into convulsions by showing him some tricks with half-pence and imitating the man who came round for tickets. We were quite delighted to hear that he was going to Mudville; we were sure of one pleasant acquaintance there at all events.

I never saw my wife so pleased with anybody in my life, for she generally puts on a haughty way with strangers, which I have heard before to-day described as "queenly;" for she is chary of making acquaintances, and never forgets her family, who, between ourselves, were against her marrying me, especially her uncle Benjamin, who was a something or other under Government in foreign parts, and came home with a pension, and no liver to speak of.

Aristocratic in a small way was Mrs. C. before she condescended to smile on Christopher Coodler, I can tell you; and she had refused a half-pay officer, a young man high up in the Customs, and a distiller with a beautiful house at Brixton, previous to my popping the question.

So, considering all things, I was surprised to see how affable she was with the Interesting Stranger bound for Mudville. When the Interesting Stranger—who, to save trouble, I will, if you don't mind, denominate I. S.—found us ruefully eyeing our luggage at the station, he smilingly came to our assistance, and pounced upon a fly—like a spider. Then he helped to pile our luggage on to the roof, and bullied and cajoled the stupid driver into an almost wakeful condition; and so at last we found ourselves on the road to Mudville, and later on *at* that retired spot.

Mudville was one of those places that beggar description. It was small and melancholy; a wretched little—but there, I won't attempt it. We had been recommended to the apartments of Mrs Grogrum, and thither we drove.

Mrs Grogrum's front apartment looked out on the sea, and by an ingenious arrangement the builder had contrived that the back windows also gave a fine view of the ocean. Mrs Grogrum's house was built diagonally (I think that's the word) and it seemed to me to catch every wind that blew. It was plentifully supplied with windows too, and they rattled delightfully without ceasing.

Mrs. Grogrum was a fiery-faced female, with the most obtrusive black "front" I ever saw. I believe that "front" to have been made of horsehair, it was so shiny, stiff, and undeceptive. From a casual glance at the rubicund features of Mrs. G., I came to a hasty conclusion that she was addicted to ardent liquors. I was not surprised at this, as it is not altogether uncommon with brandy-and-watering-place landladies Pardon my humble joke, it shall be my last.

The instant we were settled (though we were a long time coming to terms with the one-eyed fly-driver, who was pertinacious, insolent, and apparently in a chronic state of inebriety), my wife went out to see what we could have to eat; for she is a good manager, is Mrs. Coodler, and I don't know a better judge of butchers' meat or fish. So she started off with the view to seeing the tradespeople, whilst I remained to settle myself.

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Settle myself, indeed! I hadn't got through the first half of my police reports (a part of the paper for which I have a weakness, I admit), when a loud tap was heard at my door, and before I had time to say come in, the form of Mrs. Grogrum blocked up the entrance, and stood quivering with some strong emotion.

I have before observed that I am beneath middle height—a good deal beneath it—I am also a peaceable man, prone to let things take their own way, and with a sublime respect for "peace and quiet." Consequently, I will admit that the quivering frame of Mrs. Grogrum flustered me, and I felt a sudden palpitation and a general trembling, which was not lost upon the landlady, whose quivering increased, and whose features became, if possible, more fiery, as she saw me quail beneath her luminous eye.

"O sir," she blurted forth, making a sharp bob, "asking your parding, but is Mrs. Coodler to cook your mealses, or am I to do 'em? I merely wish to know, to save confusion for the futur'."

I stared. It was the only thing I could do at the moment, and I did it.

"I repeat, sir, which is to do 'em?"

"Why, Mrs. Groggins——"

"GrogRUM, sir, if *you* please," was the lofty reply; for I'd called the woman by a wrong name in the agitation of the moment.

"Rum, by all means," I responded, with a touch of humour.

She looked daggers at me, but luckily, like the gentleman in the play, "used none."

"For Mrs. Coodler, she came into my kitchen and made remarks. Now, I'm missis in my own 'ouse, I do 'ope, and I am *not* a-going to have strange ladies a-coming and poking their noses, and a-prying into *my* kitching, and a-making remarks about my domestic. Mrs. Coodler comes into *my* kitching, she does, and requestes to look at my frying-pan, and speaks sharp to my domestic as doesn't bring the frying-pan instantaneous; me being missis in my own 'ouse, and not lodgers, nor never will as long as my name's Maria Grogrum. No. Imperent curiosity is what I won't stand, because it flusters me; and one as wishes to do her dooty to parties as takes her apartments, can't be flustered and do her dooty at at the same time. So what I says, sir, is if your good lady is a-going to cook, let's know at once, and the sooner we parts the best for all concerned; but if I'm to do the cooking, why then let Mrs. Coodler keep herself to herself! a-making her complaints when proper, of course, but not a-coming a-prying about in parties' kitchings and a-asking to see frying-pans."

I believe that if a violent fit of coughing had not taken Mrs. Grogrum, she would have been speaking still.

However, she coughed and curtseyed and quivered herself gradually out of the room; and mentally determining to look for fresh lodgings as soon as possible, I again attacked the great embezzlement case at Bow Street. But I was not to get beyond the third paragraph uninterrupted.

Again the door opened, and again a form quivered with passion on the mat.

This time it was not Mrs. Grogrum, but her servant of all work, Susan, or as she called herself "Shoozan."

Shoozan had a round rosy face, and round rosy elbows; she had red hair, and was freckled in reckless profusion. She could not, even by her most ardent admirers, have been considered a "neat-handed Phyllis." The number of grates she black-leaded weekly was evidently overwhelming, when compared with the ablutionary exercises she indulged in. In short, she was "grimy" to the last degree. Shoozan was bursting with some strong grievance; so I laid down my newspaper, and waited to hear her story.

"Please, sir," she gushed out after an inward struggle, "would you like to be called a nuzzy?"

Now I don't think I *should* like to be called a nuzzy. I have no notion what it means, but it sounds insolent. Before I could reply, however, the girl burst forth again, "And if she expects as I'm going to take the children's dinner up to the the top of the 'ouse, she's mistook."

Here Shoozan waggled her head about defiantly.

"My good girl," I said, for I always feel for servants in lodging-houses, poor wretches! but the kindly tone of my voice was too much for her; she burst into a vehement boo-hoo, and wept loudly. Beauty in tears is all rubbish. Those poets again! Beauty blubbering looks frightful, with a red nose and swollen eyes. Even the plain domestic looked plainer after wiping her eyes with her apron.

"It's very hard to be called names, a poor girl as never seen her parents."

Here she burst out again.

"There, go along," I said; "Sarah shall see after the children's dinner," and with a parting howl Shoozan retired.

What a time my wife seemed away! Again I attacked the embezzlement case, and this time I got as far as the magistrate's request if the prisoner had anything to say. But no further.

The door again burst open, and Sarah Naggles stood before me.

Sarah Naggles, than whom there is not a better nurse and a more abominable temper in Britain, stood there, shaking a thousand times more than Grogrum. In a tremulous point of view the landlady was a mere blancmange compared to Sarah, who was a down-right shivering mountain. For some seconds she could not speak; at length she did—loudly.

"Mr. Coodler, sir, I wish to leave your service at once, sir, on the spot." Here she selected a stain on the drugget to stand upon, thereby adding, as she evidently imagined, force to her remark.

"Good gracious, Sarah!"

"It's no use your trying to look dignified, sir. When Sarah Naggles says a thing, Sarah Naggles means it; and I'm off by the next conveyance."

I looked round helplessly; but my wife was out still, and until she came I could say nothing. Sarah could. She was apt to stick on a good many superfluous h's when excited, and she gave as her "hopinion that the landlady was honly a helderly hignoramus." She would have continued in the same strain, but, luckily, my youngest child, with intelligence beyond its years—or, rather, months—took advantage of her absence to fall off a high chair. This necessitated the presence of Sarah upstairs, and a temporary cessation of hostilities.

I was getting tired of being bullied, and I seized my hat with the intention of going out to find Mrs. Coodler. Chancing to look out of the window, I *saw* Mrs. Coodler. Mrs. Coodler was in conversation with the Interesting Stranger. Mrs. C. was smiling, the I. S. was smiling. Apparently Mrs. C. was enjoying herself, whilst I—but the contrast was too much, and I admit I was

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injudicious enough to dash my hat down over my brows. As it stuck tight, and wouldn't come up again, I immediately repented my rashness, and felt about for the door with a crab-like action, which was appropriate to the locality, but ungraceful.

Suddenly I found myself in somebody's arms. With a convulsive effort I raised my hat; terror had endowed me with increased strength, and I had a dreadful suspicion it might be Mrs. Grogrum.

It was not. It was the one-eyed fly-driver. The one-eyed fly-driver had been drinking, and swayed backwards and forwards, occasionally hiccuping. I asked him his business.

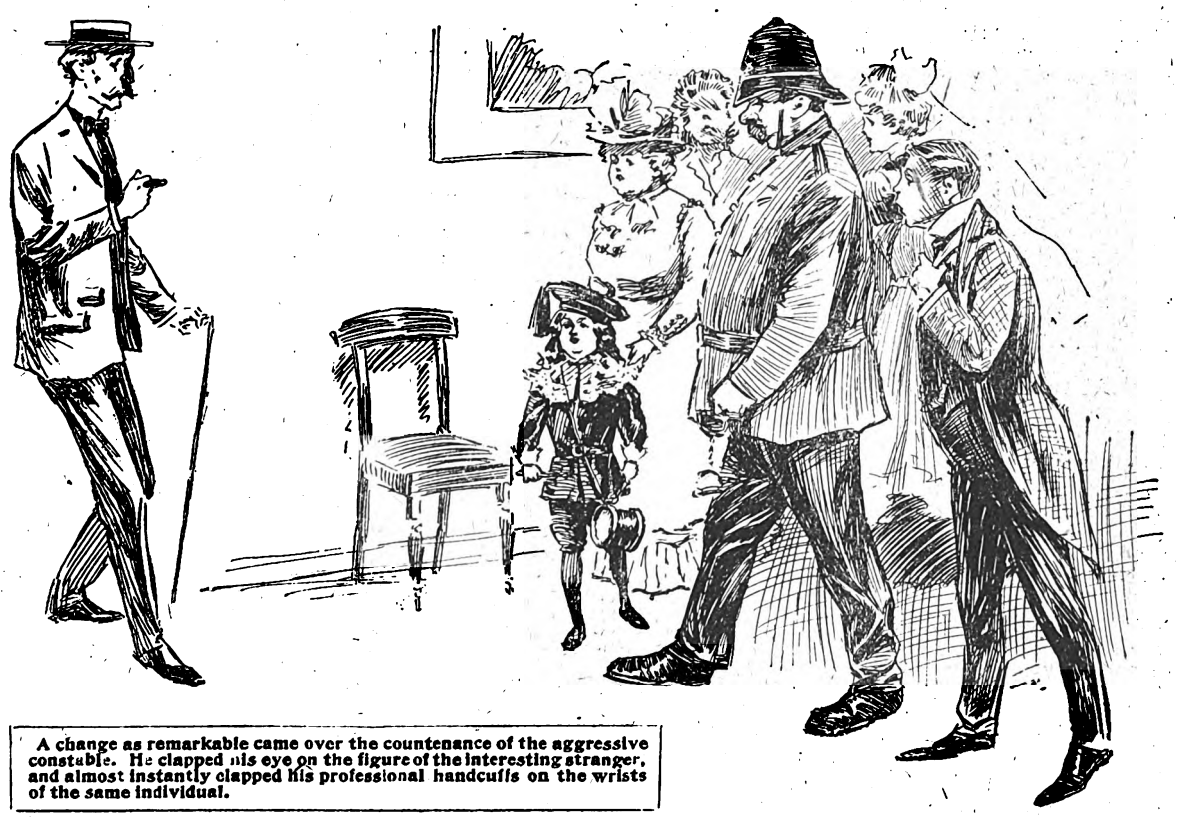
"Nor ain't going to," I replied clenchingly, if I may be allowed the expression.

"Werry good," said he; "then *my* mouth's sealed. I had a thing to say" (unintentionally quoting Mr. William Shakespeare, who *was* a poet rather), "but I won't. I'm not a-going to put my finger in no one else's pie."

If you could have seen his finger! I did, and have not eaten pie since.

He vanished. I turned my head away shudderingly, and when I recovered myself he had gone.

I was becoming rabid. I was also awfully hungry. My wife came in. I should have received her with an



A change as remarkable came over the countenance of the aggressive constable. He clapped his eye on the figure of the interesting stranger, and almost instantly clapped his professional handcuffs on the wrists of the same individual.

"Business," replied the man, looking round, as if undecided as to how he should continue, then jumping to an indisputable conclusion, "ain't pleasure. What is pleasure to some folks is pain to others."

The combination of annoyances was getting too much for me. I drew myself up, and assumed a frown.

"When I clapped my eyes," continued the driver.

"Your eye, sir," I replied, loftily. "Stick to facts."

"On you," said the one eyed incubus, not noticing my interruption, "I said, that's a gent as 'll stand a glass of summat. But you didn't now, did you?" and the fellow put his head on one side and leered hideously.

"Most decidedly I did *not*," I replied proudly.

"Nor ain't going to?" he continued.

air of sarcastic politeness (any friends of mine who read this will know the style of thing I mean—*my* playfully severe air, you know), but I was broken-spirited by recent trials.

"It's so annoying," she said, coming to the point at once; "there ain't a piece of meat to be got in the place; not even a chop to be procured for love or money before to-morrow."

"Sweet spot!" I murmured.

"And I've been to every shop in the place to get change for a five-pound note; but they say there isn't as much money in the town."

I smiled sardonically, but didn't speak.

"Then the fishmonger only comes over from Shell-

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borough on Mondays and Fridays, and to-day's Wednesday; and Mrs Grogrum says her fireplace isn't big enough to roast joints, so we must have all our meat baked; and there's no draught ale that's drinkable to be got here, because there's so little demand for it; and the poulterer's only got one very small rabbit, which is not at all good; and Mrs. Grogrum says she understood we found our own plate—she's only got two-pronged steel forks; and there's a dog next door but one, they tell me, that howls all night; and the windows in our room rattle so dreadfully, that we shan't get much sleep, I'm afraid; and there's no lock to the door; and the pillows are like dummies, they're so hard. And so you must put up with an egg and a slice of bacon for your tea."

The volubility of my wife, culminating in a decided *non sequitur*, was more than I could bear. I seized a chair in my agitation, and the back rails came off in my hands.

This calmed me. I propped it against the wall, with the determination of declaring I hadn't done it, and smiled once more.

"Mrs. Coodler," I observed (I never address my wife thus except under very peculiar circumstances)—"Mrs. Coodler, I have taken these apartments for a month, and we must try and make the best of them. Fortified by the cheering society of the Interesting Stranger, no doubt you will be able to bear up."

Mrs. Coodler coloured, and would have replied, but I waved her aside, and went out into the street to see the lions.

The lions! I was not long in seeing them all. There were the six bathing-machines, the "principal" hotel, the post-office, the library, and—nothing else. The library was an imposing edifice, that is to say, it was a dead take-in. There were no new books whatever, and I refused to be comforted by the "Adventures of a Guinea," neither could I be brought to properly appreciate the charms of "Pamela," so I went home again. I walked upstairs, and entering the apartment, found—no, reader, you're wrong for once—not the Interesting Stranger, but a policeman—a regular rural peeler. He eyed me with professional distrust and a calm smile. I swelled with indignation, and tried to awe him, but he was not to be awed.

"Good morning," said the policeman familiarly, "I presume——."

"You do, sir," I replied sharply, in my imperious manner. "You presume very considerably in entering a gentleman's apartments in this way, sir. Let me tell you, an Englishman's first floor is his castle, sir. What do you want?"

"You," replied the constable in a deep tone.

I was becoming accustomed to this sort of thing, and smiled.

"Your name is Dumpton," said the fellow.

"All right," I replied, "have it so, if you like, you must know best." I was tickled by the atrocity of the whole thing. "What's the charge? Burglary? Garroting? Murder? What is it?"

"You came from town by the half arter ten train?"

"I did."

"Good. A telegram informs me I'm to arrest a party of your description, at least, you're near enough to the description for me to arrest you. So, without more ado, come on."

My wife is an excellent woman, and at times her feelings get too many for her. She heard the final speech of the policeman, and with difficulty was dissuaded from flying at him. Such was also the case with Sarah Naggles, who has highly-developed nails, and (in consequence of blighted hopes) nourishes an abnormal hatred of "the force."

Between these two desperate women the one policeman of Mudville would, I am afraid, have come to the most unmitigated grief. He saw his peril, and produced a pair of handcuffs. I confess, the sight unmanned me, and I sank into a chair. I produced my card; I pointed to the direction on my boxes; I threatened to write to the *Times*; I explained how ridiculous it would be in a felon travelling about with a family; I pleaded and stormed alternately, but to no object.

The policeman had received his instructions, had been directed to us by the malevolent one-eyed fly driver, had executed his orders, and was deaf to reason, blind to a bribe, and generally stupid and unswervingly upright.

Mrs. Grogrum coming in suddenly upon the scene did not improve the tone of the meeting, as may be supposed.

She had settled that we "was no good" the instant Mrs. C. had made rude remarks about her frying-pan, "a article as a *reel* lady would despise to worrit herself about." And as for the sylph in the black stockings, Shoozan, she had long ago learnt to place the blindest confidence in the Mudville policeman, who was the model of manly beauty in the eyes of the neighbouring maidservants.

We were at our wit's end. My wife was frantic, the nurse furious, the children fractious. Wrapped in his panoply of authority and pig-headedness, the policeman alone was calm.

To us (at this juncture) entered blithely the Interesting Stranger. A smile was on his lip, a tear was *not* in his eye.

I was about to appeal to him to clear up the mystery, when I observed a remarkable change come over his features. At the same time a change as remarkable came over the countenance of the aggressive constable. He clapped his eye on the figure of the Interesting Stranger, and almost instantly clapped his professional handcuffs on the wrists of the same individual.

The Interesting Stranger answered to the description in the telegram in every particular; and to this day I cannot comprehend the reason for arresting me, for we are not in the least alike. The I. S. was tall; I am—well, under the middle height. The I. S. was good-looking (at least Mrs. Coodler declares so, spite of everything; and he was described by the police reporter as a "person of fashionable appearance"), and I am, I admit, not striking to look at, though dignified for a short person. The I. S. was not dressed like me either; so altogether it was a muddle at Mudville, and I might have kicked up a great row about it.

Did I stop to have any arguments, to receive the grovelling apologies of Mrs. Grogrum, the trembling beseechings of the obtuse policeman, the solemn assurances of attention and cleanliness from Shoozan, the universal sympathy of the excited populace—did I wait for all this?

Did I?

Did I fetch the one-eyed fly-driver from his favourite haunt, and bundle self and family back to town that afternoon?

Didn't I!

Read "The Golden Dwarf."

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THE ASSIZE UNDER THE CROSS.

SOME years ago I spent a summer holiday in Hungary, in a part of that country little frequented by tourists—or by anyone else, for that matter. I am partial to those spots and districts, and find rest and pleasure in them.

One afternoon I reached the little village of Panigstein and engaged, after some trouble, a bed for the coming night in the somewhat unprepossessing erection known as an inn. Most of us are taught in our school days not to judge by appearances, and the interior proved more inviting than the outside. I had heard of this village and a strange custom connected with an ancient cross there, and I wished to see this relic of the old days of martyrdom which still had such a power over the villagers.

It was not until the following morning, however, that I made my way to the stone cross. I was up early and thoroughly enjoyed the walk to the edge of the rugged heath where stood the Gothic chapel with the cross some few yards in front of it. A lovely spot! A beautiful landscape whichever way your eyes wandered; a spirit of peace all around you; a spot calculated to inspire love of the good and shame for the wrong that one might have committed. An appropriate place for holding an assize.

An unwritten law, or tradition, had ordained that once in every nineteen years the judge on circuit should sit in judgment on wrong-doers under the cross, and the strange ceremonial had an indescribable fascination for the inhabitants of the district for miles. Early on the morning of the great day the crier went through the village for the purpose of summoning the people to attend the assize, and every man, woman and child of Panigstein gathered in front of the cross at the appointed hour; absence, unless warranted by illness, was regarded as a sign that the conscience of the absentee was not clear.

That was the subject of my meditations as I surveyed the moss-grown, roughly-hewn cross, and I wondered if my host, or one of those to whom I had spoken during my short stay, could tell of any unwonted incident connected with the open-air assize. I was thinking deeply of this when I awoke to the fact that I had unconsciously begun the return journey, and I swung myself on my heels to take another look at the cross. I opened my eyes more widely in surprise when I observed the figure of a woman, dressed in mourning, standing before it—stand for a second and then sink on her knees in an attitude of prayer.

I felt like an intruder and walked away more rapidly; but I was curious and wanted to know all about it, just as a child desires to have all the details of some small happening affecting or interesting itself. I had scarcely entered the inn before I interrogated the landlord; he looked serious for a moment, then remarked that it was the "anniversary of the affair" and volunteered to tell me the story. I will give it in more coherent form than he, for his narrative was interlarded with remarks foreign to the subject.

Luiza Polkai was the daughter of a well-to-do farmer of Panigstein, who had been burgomaster for three years in succession. The fact that she was pretty as well as heiress to what was regarded as a fortune in that little community, was sufficient to make all the young men anxious to take her to wife. Luiza showed no special preference, but availed herself of the attentions, and accepted the presents of flowers, of any one of her admirers as the fancy took her. After a time, one of the young fellows, Mor Givaur, resolved on the bold course of taking her by storm, as it were, and audaciously declared to her that he knew she loved him and that he intended to ask her father for permission to marry her.

This course of action amused and pleased the girl; she felt that this young fellow must indeed be madly in love with her to dare so much and she experienced a sensation of admiration that was certainly akin to love.

She neither gave her consent to his approaching her father on the subject nor did she bid him to do so; hence, he took silence for consent and had an interview with the burgomaster.

But Luiza's father, a choleric man, was angry when he discovered that Mor had come without his daughter's consent; he did not see things in the same way as the young man, and characterised the step as an insult to his child and himself. Further, he disliked Mor Givaur—although he did not say so at the time, and he objected to him as a son-in-law.

Mor went straight to Luiza and told her briefly that the interview had not been quite satisfactory, but that he considered her as belonging to him, and would again see her father in a few days. Luiza began to think that this was the kind of man who would make her a good husband; she liked his masterful ways; so she smiled and wished him, half in jest and half in earnest, success in his undertaking, but she would not permit the caress which he desired. The burgomaster thought it best not to allude to the interview, and so a week passed.

Then Mor tried the old man again, and this time there was a quarrel. Polkai raked up an old grievance of his against the young man's father; Mor became hot—his temper was of the quick, violent kind that is soon spent—and high words followed. All the village learnt about it bit by bit, and it was the one, the all-absorbing topic of conversation until Burgomaster Polkai was found murdered on the high road just outside Panigstein late one night by a party of searchers who were trying to ascertain the reason of his non-arrival home from the market town.

Suspicion fell on Mor Givaur, but the fact that Polkai had been robbed was rather in Mor's favour. It gave colour to the contention of Givaur and his friends that the crime was the work of thieves. Mor was able to prove that he was two miles away from the scene of the murder up till an hour before the time when the murder was probably committed and that he then left some friends and took a direction that would lead him so far from the spot as to make it impossible for him to get

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there and commit the crime within the specified time.

On the whole, there was no evidence of any value against anyone, and the general opinion prevailed that the murder had been perpetrated by robbers.

Efforts to track the robbers failed entirely and no clue whatever could be obtained concerning the perpetrator or perpetrators of the crime; the interest in the case died away and people ceased to think about it.

But Luiza was determined not to let the matter drop so easily; she had offered a reward and had taken the keenest interest in all that had happened. Her natural grief had early given place to a vehement desire for revenge on the one who had deprived her of a loving parent, and she had formed a resolve to devote the rest of her life and her money to the task of bringing the murderer to justice or punishing him herself. She lived in the farmhouse, leaving the work of cultivation to the supervision of a man, one Patzki, who had acted as a kind of steward to her father.

Mor Givaur refrained from pressing his suit for nearly a year, contenting himself with an occasional visit; but he felt sure of success when the period of mourning was over, and his former rivals left him a free field, believing they had no chance. Luiza received him in a manner that encouraged him although it was not demonstrative or even indicative of great affection. Mor accepted this as natural in the circumstances, and had no suspicion of the real facts.

Luiza, after having considered all the details that had reached her, had formed the opinion that the man who was attempting to woo her was responsible for her father's death—he had either killed the old burgomaster himself or had caused him to be killed. She had discovered that her father was cognisant of a certain dark passage in the life of Givaur's father—something that had happened when they were both quite lads and lived elsewhere—and the burgomaster had threatened to reveal this passage if Givaur persisted in his suit; this had not been made known at the time of the investigation of the murder; Luiza had gained the information piece by piece, connecting odd words and phrases of Givaur himself with other evidence and, above all, with a paper found among her father's effects. She was convinced of the accuracy of her opinion, but she must get evidence to bring him within the law in such a manner that he could not escape.

So she at length began to mildly encourage his suit; her desire for revenge triumphed over her loathing of the heartlessness and duplicity of a man who was paying court to the daughter of the one he killed. She hoped to entrap him when he should be suspecting nothing and thus make him encompass his own destruction. As she had kept to herself her vow to avenge her father, Mor would be far more likely to fall into the snare.

But try as she might, she could get no nearer. Another six months passed, and she now threw herself more into her task and showed her affection openly; she encouraged him to the utmost that she dared, for she declined to give him a decisive answer and fix a date for their union. People said Luiza was playing with the young man, and Givaur, on one occasion reproached her for her cruelty—and at once craved her pardon.

Luiza began to despair of accomplishing her task and cast about her for some other method. Suddenly she remembered the assize under the cross, which would take place in three months. She knew quite well that Mor Givaur was as superstitious as most of the inhabitants and her mind was made up.

"I want you to help me at the assize," she said to the woman who acted as maid-of-all-work to her. "I will bring my father's murderer to his just fate." And she explained her plan.

"I dare not do it!" gasped the affrighted woman. "Suppose——"

"We suppose nothing," returned Luiza calmly. "You will do as I bid you, and if you fail, then the blood of my father will be upon your head!"

Between the two alternatives the poor woman had no will of her own; she must either risk offending the judge or bring a dreadful something upon herself in another form. She was powerless to do anything but yield to Luiza.

Luiza Polkai laid her plan for the great day; she believed that she was acting as the instrument of Heaven, for Luiza was imbued with the popular awe of the spot and the occasion.

The day of the assize arrived and the crier summoned all to attend. The inhabitants gathered in front of the cross; Mor Givaur was there, looking for his sweetheart, whom he failed to see.

"Where is your mistress?" he inquired of Maria.

"She is not well, but she will try to be here," responded the woman in a shaky voice. "She must try to come, because the murderer of her father——"

Maria was interrupted by a movement that announced the arrival of the judge; Givaur slipped back to the side of a friend and all watched and waited.

The judge took up his position with due solemnity; he held a paper that usually contained the names of the accused, but was this time blank.

After a few formal words intended as an opening speech, he continued:

"Our meeting to-day at this historic and hallowed spot will be of short duration, as there has been no crime during the past two years, when prisoners were tried at the usual court. I must congratulate——"

Then an extraordinary thing occurred; the judge was interrupted. It was Maria's voice that cut short his congratulations; her acquaintances marvelled that she had the courage.

"My mistress' father was murdered less than two years ago. Let the murderer of Burgomaster Polkai be tried!"

The judge conferred hastily with the new burgomaster and gleamed some details; then he spoke:

"My good woman, much as I deplore the crime, I can do nothing. It must be plain to you that we cannot try the culprit if he is not here." Under his breath he added: "She must be mad!"

"He is here!" said Maria, maintaining control of her voice by a great effort. Her eyes were looking vacantly into space, as though some dread power was forcing her to act. "His name is Mor Givaur!"

The accused man uttered a cry of surprise with just a trace of fear in it: his cheeks paled and he looked from Maria to the judge in mute inquiry. Patzki, who was near Maria, fell back with a cry; he had fixed his eyes on her at her first words and had been unable to turn them away. "She's mad," he muttered hoarsely, and his friends pitied him, for it was an understood thing that they were to be married shortly.

Another hasty conference and the judge understood what course to adopt; it would be a good opportunity to remove the stigma from the young fellow.

Read "The Golden Dwarf."

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"You have made an accusation," observed the judge gravely. "We will hear the witnesses. I know the facts of the case. Have you any witness who can actually prove Mor Givaur to be the murderer?"

Maria's eyes wandered to the back of the crowd; she knew the part that Luiza expected her to play. The success of the plot depended on the superstition of the villagers, and it was her duty to excite them—including the culprit—to such a pitch that the last-mentioned would betray himself,

"Yes!" said Maria solemnly. "A witness whom none can contradict! The spirit of Burgomaster Polkai! See!" she almost shrieked, pointing to the back of the crowd, and all present involuntarily turned. "Here he comes, in the very blue coat, in the very hat—dressed exactly as he was that night!"

A thrill of horror went through them all as they saw the figure of Polkai coming toward them; they fell back to let it pass on its way to the cross, to face and accuse Mor Givaur. In spite of his superior mental calibre, the judge could not restrain a shiver.

The figure moved slowly onwards, but there was no abject cry, no betraying sign, from Givaur. The eyes of the figure seemed to blaze with avenging wrath. The people stood transfixed, waiting.

Suddenly a piercing cry—a horrible scream that seemed to change their blood to ice, drew the attention of the assembled villagers to another person than Mor Givaur and caused the figure to stop abruptly. The cry came from Patzki, near to whom the apparition had just passed; he held his hands before his face, as if to ward off a blow.

"Mercy! Mercy!" he shrieked "I see the blood, it is on my hands now! It will never come out, it stains too deeply! Mercy!" And he fell to the ground in a fit.

"It was not Mor Givaur, and I have wronged him all this time," came in a despairing voice from the apparition.

Luiza, for it was Polkai's daughter, walked unsteadily to the cross, the judge stepping aside, fell on her knees and prayed.

* * * * *

Patkzi confessed his guilt, but he died of heart disease before he could be tried. He had been secretly defrauding his master for a long time, and while he was away for two days Polkai had confirmed a growing suspicion. The two men met on the fatal night and Polkai had there and then accused Patzki, threatening to have him arrested on the morrow. Patzki had committed the crime in a fit of fear and anger.

"I tried to make up for it by being honest in my dealings with my mistress," was his last remark.

Luiza Polkai sold her farm and went from the village. Mor Givaur forgave her for her cruel opinion and deceit, and would have married her; but she could not forgive herself and left him, although everyone believed she loved him. Every anniversary of her father's death sees her at the cross, where she mourns a lost parent and a lost love; but she speaks to no one and nobody attempts to speak to her.

Mor Givaur left the village, too, and his whereabouts was never known.

Maria received a handsome present from her mistress and went to live in another part of the country, where she married.

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The Man with the White Neckcloth.

MONTEVARO—or "Monte" as he was more generally called—the little grimy, garlic-loving foreign sailor, was guilty of a slight oversight in respect to latitude and longitude when he got into a row with a night watchman down at the docks.

In the heat of the moment, and under the impression no doubt that his foot was on his native soil—the island of Cuba—he proceeded to settle the dispute after the manners and customs of his country, namely, by putting a knife into his opponent. For which indiscretion the said Monte was hustled into the dock at the Old Bailey in as short a space as the formalities of the law would allow.

It was a commonplace and vulgar little crime, and, for my part, my attention was drawn to it solely by the fact that I happened to be present in court when the little sailorman was put on trial.

Turning to look at him, as he stood in the dock, I was struck by one rather singular circumstance. Though it was the height of summer, and the weather was warm enough in all conscience, he was muffled to the chin in a heavy crimson scarf, which he appeared very anxious to keep in its proper place. From time to time I noticed that he raised his hand in a somewhat nervous, fidgety manner, as if it was more on his mind than the charge of inflicting "grevious bodily harm," which he seemed to take airily enough.

The case was going dead against him, without even an extenuating circumstance having been brought to light so far, and it looked as if he would come in for a pretty stiff sentence. But Monte had a surprise card up his sleeve.

In order to rebut the suggestions of the Crown, which made him out to be a very desperate and blood-thirsty little rascal, he called a certain Mr. Montagu Cardwell, whose address was given as a fashionable West-End hotel.

There was quite a subdued stir in court when, in answer to the usher's call, a spruce, dapper, soldierly little man, with the air and bearing of a retired general, stepped into the witness-box and bowed gravely to the judge.

In a very superior tone and manner he testified that during a lengthy residence in Cuba he had been brought into contact with this man Montevaro, who was, according to Mr. Montagu Cardwell, a most peaceable law-abiding, unoffending and altogether much-maligned individual. It was true, Mr Cardwell went on to explain, that the prisoner was subject to violent outbursts of passion, which were to be attributed mainly, if not entirely, to the fact that he had at one time received a severe injury to the head. When provoked the little sailor could scarcely be held responsible for his actions.

Having said all that he could for the accused, and turned the tide very much in his favour, Mr. Montagu Cardwell bowed to the judge again and stepped down.

As he descended the steps of the witness-box, his head slightly lowered, I noticed that he flashed one quick intelligent look at the man in the dock, which was so covert and stealthy that few besides myself could have observed it. Monte caught it, though, and showed all his white teeth in a satisfied grin.

That look struck me as being remarkably odd, and instantly set me thinking. It seemed to point to the fact that there was some connection, some secret tie, between this Mr. Cardwell and the little sailor, though it was scarcely possible to imagine how two such persons could be associated in any way. What league or confederacy was wide enough to embrace a man who made his home at a fashionable West-End hotel and one who was compelled to spend his days in the stuffy evil-smelling forecastle of a foreign barque?

My thoughts were immediately switched off upon this side-track. My whole interest in the trial had fizzled out. I did not even wait to learn the sentence meted out to Monte. Seeing that Mr Montagu Cardwell had left the court, I rose at once and slipped out after him.

Pushing my way through the crowd of witnesses and policemen that blocked the passage and hall, I found him poised on the step at the entrance, glancing up and down the street as if undecided which way to take. As I brushed past him on my way out, one peculiarity in his style of dress, which I had already noticed as he stood in the witness-box, caught my eye again. Inside his collar, folded neatly round the throat, and reaching almost to the chin, was a white neckcloth of the finest silk. Itmay have been merely a fashion he had picked up abroad of course; but taken in conjunction with the way in which Montevaro sought to conceal his throat, the fact struck me as somewhat singular, to say the least of it.

I turned off to the right, and walked slowly in the direction of Holborn. Though I did not venture to glance back, I was very curious to know whether the little man was still on the step, or if he had disappeared. I was as keen upon keeping him in sight as if I had been told off specially to shadow him.

Just as I reached the corner there was a quick firm

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step behind me, and the next moment Cardwell swung past. With the brisk air of a man who wasn't given to wasting his time he turned into Holborn and walked quickly toward the viaduct. I followed at some little distance, keeping a watchful eye upon him.

He never paused, or even slackened his pace, until he had got well past Chancery Lane, when he swung into one of the fashionable restaurants in that quarter. I hung back for a minute or two, and then strolled in after him. He was standing in the tessellated hall, his back towards me, intent upon studying some theatrical poster. I passed on, made my way to the smoking-room, ordered whiskey and a cigar, and waited.

At this hour of the day—it was scarcely noon yet—the smoking-room was practically deserted. There were not more than half-a-dozen occupants in all, and for the most part they seemed to be business people who had dropped in for a few minutes in passing. One man alone caught and riveted my attention.

He was standing near one of the little marble-topped tables, in the act of lighting a cigar, so that I had a good opportunity of observing him without appearing in any way obtrusive.

A man of magnificent physique, in the prime of life too, he was without exception one of the finest specimens of the human race I have ever seen. His swarthy complexion, dark eyes, and strong, regular features, showed that he had Spanish blood in his veins, wherever he hailed from. On looking at him more closely, a peculiar fulness in the red lips, and certain other characteristics, left little doubt upon my mind that he was a Creole.

Having got his cigar well under way he sank into a deep armchair with a sigh of placid contentment, tilted his chin up, and spouted a jet of smoke high into the air.

I was so deeply occupied in watching this interesting stranger that I quite lost sight of the object I had in view when I turned in here. Just at that moment, however, I was startled by hearing a smothered exclamation close behind me, which I took to have some reference to myself. My head went round over my shoulder with a jerk; and there, standing near the door, within a yard or two of me, I beheld Mr. Montague Cardwell.

But it was not upon me that his eyes were fixed. His gaze travelled past me and had fastened upon the stranger, whose back was partly towards him, with an expression of such vindictive triumph that I involuntarily glanced at the Creole, half expecting to see him start round every instant under the magnetic power of that deadly look riveted upon him.

But no; he seemed blissfully unconscious of the fact that anyone had entered the room, or that he was in such close proximity to a man who appeared to regard him with mortal enmity.

For a few brief seconds Cardwell stood there, striving to get his unruly passions well in hand, as it seemed. Then, with a smile which it was anything but pleasant to behold, he moved forward softly and tapped the other lightly on the shoulder.

Good Heavens! Never in my life did I witness anything like the ghastly, shuddering fear that leaped into the Creole's eyes as he turned his head and saw who was standing behind him. The very sight of that cool, dapper little man, whom, if it was merely a case of brute strength, he could have crushed the life out of with the greatest ease, seemed to melt his heart within him. He made one or two feeble efforts to rise from his seat, but collapsed into it again the next second.

At last he succeeded in getting upon his feet, a sickly greyness showing through the tan of his face, his full lips hanging loose. The cigar had fallen from his nerveless fingers, and lay reeking on the floor at his feet, a mute testimony to the shock which had stricken him.

For some seconds they stood thus, those two men, staring at each other in that grimly tragic manner, and utterly oblivious apparently to the presence of anyone else.

Cardwell was the first to break silence.

"Come out," he said, with a motion of his head towards the door.

The Creole did not move.

"Do you hear?" went on his companion. "Come out at once, or——"

He made a movement as if to leave the room, which seemed to cow the other into instant submission. With a lurch he hastened to join the little man, who took him by the arm and led him away.

As they passed through the door, I waited a moment or two, and then hurried out after them. I was just in time to see them get into a hansom together and drive off in the direction of Oxford Street.

* * * * *

Two days later that magnificent-looking Creole, whom I had last seen in the full vigour of health and strength, was found hanging, a stiffened corpse, in an empty house out at Fulham. He had been dead, the doctors declared, for ten or twelve hours before the body was discovered.

To the police it was clearly a case of suicide. But I knew better. Though I told them of the strange encounter I had witnessed between the dead man and Montagu Cardwell, they pooh-poohed the idea of foul play. I believe in the end they endeavoured to trace Cardwell, but he was not to be found.

As nothing transpired in the course of the next few weeks to throw the smallest light upon this singular affair, the case was added to the long list of unsolved London mysteries.

* * * * *

I think it was somewhere about the middle of the October following that I climbed the steps of a Kensington 'bus at Charing Cross one evening, just as it was growing dusk. There were a good many people on top, and I was compelled to take a seat beside a stout, heavy man, whose face was buried in a newspaper.

I paid little attention to my burly neighbour at first but gradually it began to dawn upon me that he must have remarkably keen eyesight if he could decipher print in such a light as this.

I glanced round at him in some surprise, and as I did so I became aware of a most astonishing and bewildering fact. He was holding the paper upside down!

Leaning back in the seat I tried to get a glimpse at his face, and saw that he was using the paper merely as a screen, behind which to conceal his features. He seemed to be in a nervous panic lest he should be seen and recognised.

When the 'bus pulled up at Piccadilly Circus I happened to be looking the other way, thinking of something else at the moment.

A quick gasp beside me, and a sound as if the paper was crumpled up suddenly, brought my head round in an instant, and to my surprise, I saw that my

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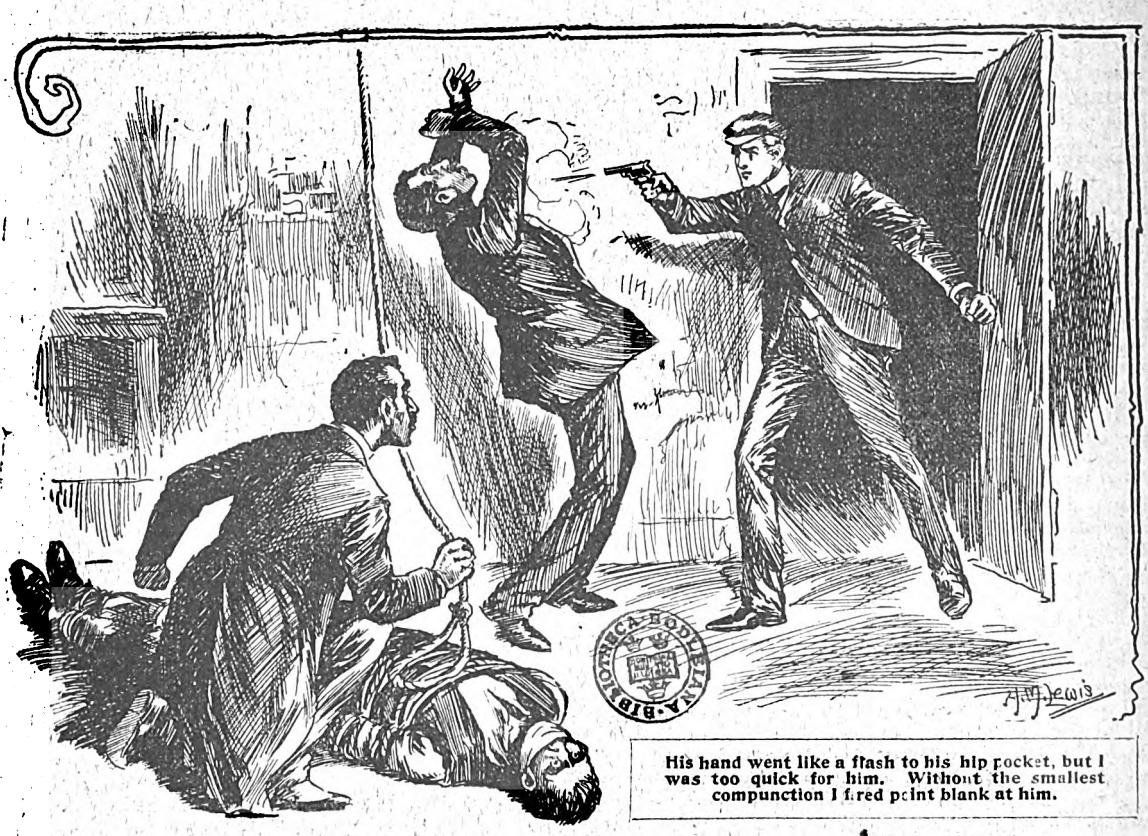

His hand went like a flash to his hip pocket, but I was too quick for him. Without the smallest compunction I fired point blank at him.

stout friend was staring down over the side as if there was something which positively fascinated him.

Half rising from the seat I craned my neck over his shoulder, and very nearly collapsed when I noticed upon whom his eyes were fixed.

Down there on the pavement, in the midst of the jostling throng, and looking straight up at us, was Montagu Cardwell!

For a second or two he regarded the stranger with much the same deadly look as he had fastened upon the Creole; then swung round upon his heel and disappeared quickly through the crowd.

The stout man dropped back in his seat like a dead weight, his eyes almost starting from his head, his trembling fingers clawing at his collar as if it was choking him.

"I fear you are unwell," I said, turning to him with some concern, for I really thought that he might go off into a fit at any moment.

His only answer was a groan.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" I went on, sincerely anxious to be of some service to him.

"I thank you," he returned. "Nothing."

He made an effort to pull himself together, and succeeded so far that he was able to enter into a desultory conversation. But I could see by the way he swayed to and fro in his seat, and the deep, groaning sighs which came from him, that he was still inwardly on the rack, and felt an uncomfortable sense of sitting next to a man with acute mental suffering.

When the 'bus stopped opposite the station in High Street, Kensington, I turned to my new friend, who was deeply absorbed in his own gloomy thoughts at the moment.

"I am getting down here," I remarked.

"Eh?" he said, starting from his reverie. "So will I. I'll walk the rest of the way. It will do me good."

On reaching the pavement he looked around him in a dull, vacant manner, apparently quite at sea as to his whereabouts.

"Will you allow me to offer you a glass of wine before you go?" I said, for I was reluctant to leave him in such a helpless condition.

He clutched eagerly at the proposal. I think he was glad of any excuse to remain in my company a little longer. We entered a comfortable saloon bar close by and seated ourselves on either side of one of the little round tables. I ordered the refreshments, and then fell to studying my stout friend.

He was evidently a man who had knocked about the world a good deal, and there were plenty of indications that his life had been a stormy and eventful one. But though he may have been able to hold his own right enough in times past, there was little backbone in him now.

His spirit had evidently been crushed and broken. He gave me the impression of one who was pursued by some haunting phantom, from which he strove in vain to escape.

A sudden impulse seized upon me as we sat there together, and I leaned forward across the table.

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"Tell me," I said, looking straight at him, "do you happen to know a man named Montagu Cardwell?"

He had raised his glass to his lips, but as I put the question he set it back very deliberately on the table and rose slowly to his feet. In his eyes there was such a fixed look of horror and consternation that I was instantly smitten with remorse.

Then, before I had time to stammer out an apology, he lurched forward suddenly and pitched head-foremost across the marble slab between us, sending the glasses flying to the ground with a crash.

There was a hubbub and a scene, of course, and all those in the bar came buzzing around us. As for me, I was so shocked by the astounding effect of my rash question that I was able to render little assistance.

I could only stand by and look on helplessly while the others strove to revive my unfortunate companion.

When he came round at last he was in such a state of collapse that I saw it would be necessary for me to convey him home. We got him into a hansom and I hastened to take my place at his side. In answer to my inquiry he mumbled an address at Hammersmith, to which I ordered the cabman to drive.

The house, I found, consisted of a small shop in a rather dingy thoroughfare down near the river, with a side entrance giving access to the rooms above. After fumbling in his pockets for some little time my companion produced a latchkey, which he silently handed to me. I opened the side door, and we entered a dark, narrow passage, where, by dint of striking several matches, I discovered a candle on a wall-bracket. Having lighted it, I assisted the stout man upstairs.

Judging by appearances he evidently lived here quite alone. In a bare front room off the landing, into which he tottered, I found the remains of his breakfast still on the table. I sat down, determined to keep him company for an hour or so.

At first he seemed to regard me with a sort of shrinking suspicion, but when I explained to him that I knew nothing of this Montagu Cardwell, or had any connection with him whatever, his face cleared. I went on to say that I had first seen the man in the witness-box at the Old Bailey, and that my question had been prompted solely by my having recognised him again in Piccadilly a short time back. I made no reference to his meeting with the Creole, however.

The stout man, who informed me that his name was Weaver, appeared vastly relieved as I finished. Indeed, he seemed to have conceived a sudden friendship for me and sought to detain me by every means in his power, as if he felt a certain sense of security in my presence.

When I rose to depart he looked up at me with something approaching fear in his eyes.

"You're not going?" he asked quickly.

"I'm afraid I must," I answered. "But I'll come back again to-morrow evening if you like."

"Do," he said, heartily. "Come late—about eleven. Here, take the latchkey," he went on, pushing it across the table towards me. "I've got another one somewhere and can do without it. Let yourself in quietly; and—and—listen first. If you hear a noise——" He broke off abruptly, shivered a little, and covered his face with his great, fleshy hand. And thus I left him.

Before starting out on the following evening I took the precaution of shoving a trusty little six-shooter into my hip pocket, for, considering all things, I thought it just as well to go "heeled" as the Yankees say.

On reaching the house, which seemed to be in total darkness, I let myself in without a sound. Then, acting upon Weaver's advice, I stood for a moment in the narrow passage, listening intently.

Did I hear a noise? I did! Though I couldn't make out exactly what it was, a vague sense of alarm seized upon me and I hastily slipped the revolver from my pocket.

It seemed to me as if there was a confused shuffling somewhere overhead, which was followed by a strange, flopping sort of sound, as if someone was floundering about on the bare floor. I felt convinced there was villainy on foot, though what the nature of it was I couldn't imagine.

With the revolver ready in my hand I crept cautiously up the stairs, and reached the landing in safety. The sounds came from a back room, and as I stole towards the door on tiptoe I heard something that seemed to make my blood run cold. It was like a smothered bellow of fear, as if someone was vainly attempting to shriek for help.

Without a moment's hesitation I flung open the door and dashed into the room. Good Heavens! Never to my dying day will I forget the appalling sight that met my gaze!

There, lying on the bare floor, his huge, ungainly body swathed in rope, a handkerchief bound tightly over his mouth, and his eyes starting from their sockets, was the unfortunate Weaver. A rope was dangling from a pulley which had been attached to a hook in the ceiling, and two men were down on their knees beside the wretched victim, doing their best to get the noose at the end over his head. Great God! he was about to suffer the same fate as the Creole. These men had come here for the express purpose of hanging him!

All this I took in at a glance, but scarcely had I done so than the man nearest me sprang to his feet with a fierce oath. His hand went like a flash towards his hip pocket, but I was too quick for him. Without the smallest compunction I fired point blank at him and dropped him in his tracks. At the same instant the second man sprang across the prostrate body, and was upon me before I had time to turn round. He was none other than Montagu Cardwell himself!

For the next couple of minutes we had a fairly hot time of it, Cardwell making desperate efforts to get hold of the revolver. But though wiry enough, and full of fight too, he was of no great account in a close scrimmage of this kind. And when he saw, as he soon did, that he was likely to get the worst of it, he promptly wrenched himself free, darted through the open door, and went clattering off down the stairs.

The instant he was gone I rushed to the assistance of the unfortunate Weaver and very soon had him on his feet again. Then, as I noticed that the fellow whom I had winged, who did not appear to be very badly hurt, was beginning to stir, I flew downstairs, summoned a policeman, and gave the rascal into his charge.

* * * * *

It was fully a week before poor Weaver, whose nerves had been scattered by the shock, was in a condition to be questioned regarding this dastardly attempt upon his life. I visited him frequently, and one morning, finding him more cheerful than usual, I ventured to relate the extraordinary scene I had witnessed in the

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smoking-room of a Holborn restaurant, adding that the Creole was afterwards found hanging in an empty house sat Fulham.

"Ah," said my companion, "I knew that poor fellow well. Alvarez was his name, and he was an old comrade of mine. I read all about the thing in the newspapers at the time, though I daren't come forward to denounce his murderers. It would have been as much as my own life was worth."

"But what does it all mean?" I asked.

"I'll tell you," he said, as if there was now no further need for concealment. "You must know that though I am English by birth, most of my life has been spent out in Cuba, where I and a few others held certain concessions from the Spanish government. This Montagu Cardwell was one of those associated with me; Alvarez another.

"Though Cardwell was always a difficult man to get on with, things went well enough until the insurrection broke out. That soon burst us up, for we were upon what was called the neutral territory, which was ravaged by each side in succession, and in a very short time was little better than a howling wilderness.

"Cardwell and a few others went off to join the rebels; the rest of us, including Alvarez and myself, stood by the government, and were enrolled in a body of irregulars that fought for Spain.

"Do you know what that insurrection in Cuba was like in those early days? Hell let loose! No quarter was shown on either side. If any of the rebels were captured, they were strung up straight away to the nearest tree, and, of course, the opposite party retaliated in the same manner.

"As ill-luck would have it, the company to which I belonged captured Cardwell and three or four others. Though he never knew it—indeed, he always supposed the exact opposite to the case—I pleaded hard for his life. But it was no use; the whole lot were strung up on the spot, and were only saved by the arrival of a strong body of insurgents, who came on the scene just in time to cut them down."

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed, for Cardwell's object in wearing that white neckcloth now suddenly dawned upon me. It was to hide the ugly scar left by the rope! And no doubt the little sailor, Montevaro, on whose behalf he had testified so warmly, was one of his companions on that memorable occasion.

"Some months later," Weaver went on, "it came round to me that Cardwell regarded Alvarez and myself as being mainly instrumental for his hanging, and had vowed that we both should suffer a similar fate sooner or later.

"When America finally stepped in I took the first opportunity of leaving the country, advising Alvarez to do the same. Knowing what sort of man Cardwell was, and that nothing on earth would turn him from his purpose once his mind was made up to a thing, I thought it better to put the ocean between us.

"We came to England, the pair of us, thinking that here we would be safe from pursuit. But our enemy, was upon our track, secure as we deemed ourselves. Poor Alvarez was the first to fall into his hands. Cardwell, of course, had some of his old comrades with him, but how they managed the rascally affair is more than I can say.

"The rest you know. I myself would have shared the same fate but for you, my good friend."

"And do you happen to have heard anything of this man Cardwell since?" I asked.

He brightened up at once.

"This very morning," he replied. "I received a letter from Paris to say that he turned up there, and it appears the first person he ran across was a Spanish officer who had fought in Cuba. They soon got to loggerheads; a duel was arranged; and Cardwell was mortally wounded. He died before they could remove him from the ground, so you see I have nothing further to fear from him."

A little boy, upon being asked by his sister what capital punishment was, replied that it was being locked up in a pantry with the jam and other nice things.

"Yes, Miss Ethel, if your sister had ever allowed me to kiss her before we were engaged I never should have asked her to become my wife." "Oh, she knew that well enough; she had it played on her too often before."

"I've been in sixteen engagements," said Colonel Warhorse to Miss Flypp. "Oh, that's nothing! I've been engaged six times myself. And look at the difference in our ages."

"Oh, no there ain't no favourites in this house!" soliloquised little Johnny; "oh dear no. If I bite my finger nails I catch it across the knuckles, but when baby tries to eat his 'ole foot, mamma's delighted."

"Is it true, my son," said the old man to him reproachfully, "that you put flypaper on the seat of the teacher's chair, and laughed when he sat down on it?" "I cannot tell a lie, father, that's the fact; but I felt sorry for it afterwards." "You felt that it was disrespectful to the teacher?" "No, sir; I felt that it was cruel to the flies."

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Shrewd Mary's Little Stratagem.

WHEN the engagement of Mary Applegate to Robert Black was announced, most of the young lady's friends asked one another how on earth she managed to catch him.

"She's twenty-seven," they added, "only passably good looking, and every one knows that for years she has been unsuccessfully striving to find a desirable husband."

A chat with her old friend, Charlie Wroithesley, showed Mary that she must pose as a serious, intelligent young woman to have any chance.

Robert soon took an interest in the intelligent, well dressed, pleasant looking, if hardly handsome, girl who listened eagerly to his most serious conversation and surprised him with the range of her knowledge and soundness of her judgement in agreeing with all his views after thoughtful discussion.

Robert was far too busy with politics to know much about society or its gossip, and Mary was right in her assumption that he at first would be ignorant of everything about her or her history; but the poor girl could not prevent her rivals and their allies from telling tales concerning her and her search for a husband, and, although relying upon what he assumed to be his judgment of human character, Robert disbelieved nearly all that was told to him, there remained in his mind an unpleasant feeling that Mary Applegate might be a charming, intelligent young lady, but was also a dangerous flirt and a schemer.

Suddenly Robert was called to London on business, but made a promise to return in two days, and poor Mary added another to her collection of sleepless nights.

Next morning Mary ate no breakfast, and, on plea of headache, went up early to her room. At midday she jumped off the sofa on which she had been lying with a look of excitement in her eyes.

"I'll do it!" she said to herself, "it's a desperate trick—it's a wretched trick—it's shameful, but they say 'all's fair in love or war,' though I'm sure that's quite untrue."

She sat down and began to write. Her first letter was addressed to Robert. It was short and simple. She ventured to remind him that he had promised to bring from his town house two or three books on the South African question, in which he took a great interest.

The next letter was addressed to her friend, Charlotte Claireville. The four pages of the first sheet were mere gossip and friendly chatter; the rest of the letter must be set out verbatim:

> And now I must tell you of a more serious matter, of one concerning which I can hardly speak, and, indeed, could not unbosom myself except to you alone in this wide world. For the first time in my life I have come to know the meaning of the word "love." I am in love, and hopelessly,—and, oh, my dear, he is such a splendid man!—not physically, perhaps, though he is very good looking, but he has a large, luminous mind, I can tell that something has crept between us, and that, perhaps, not knowingly, he believes I am only a schemer. Why can't something happen to show the falsehood of that? To think that, if I were only rich, he would know that I am sincere! I can't write any more, dear, and I am becoming a wreck.
>
> Your unhappy old friend,
> MARY.

Mary dropped one or two real tears over the letter—she was very sorry for herself and far from confident about her plans; then she carefully put the first sheet of the long letter into an envelope and addressed it to "Miss Charlotte Claireville," and she took the rest of the letter, and also the letter to Robert, and put them together into an envelope, which she addressed to him. After this she changed her dress, did up her hair, sponged her eyes with cold water, put the two letters in the postoffice and ate a big lunch.

On his return to the Lechlades', Robert Black found Mary sitting under a tree in the garden, looking very picturesque.

Her cheeks flushed when he came towards her. He did not guess that this was in consequence of guilt.

"Mary," he said, speaking with difficulty, "you have done a clumsy and I an ungentlemanly thing."

"What is it?" she asked.

"In your letter to me, by accident, you enclosed part of a letter to someone else."

She gave a most artistic little cry, and guilt flushed her cheek again most becomingly; he did not ascribe the blush to guilt.

"Oh, give it me—give it me!" she called out. "Give it back! you haven't——" she paused.

"I will give you your letter only on one condition," he answered.

"A condition?"

"Yes; that you give me the writer."

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DICK FLETCHER'S GUY.

"Oh yes! I can tell you any number of stories, if it comes to that—true ones mind you," said Josiah Sampson, ex-warder of H.M. Convict Prison Portland.

"Five-and-twenty years I served on the Island, and if I were to tell you a hundredth part only of the things I saw and went through during that time, well—you'd say I was a liar!

"This tale, however, of how Dick Fletcher broke prison—did a guy, we call it—and slipped through our fingers, is quite within reason, though it stands to-day underscored in red, in the history of Portland Prison.

"At the time it happened, I hadn't long joined as assistant warder. This meant low pay, and the roughest work. By rough work I mean long hours, and the doing duty during the day in the West Quarries, which district is always allotted to the worst character gangs.

"In these particular gangs or parties, some of the most desperate criminals might then have been found. As a matter of fact, in No. 19, the party to which I was attached as assistant, then, were, out of a total of twenty-five men, seven 'lifers,' all sentenced for murder.

"We also had with us one of the notorious Bank forgers, but only for a short period; as an order from the Home Office came down which directed that he should be for the future, kept at work inside the prison. He had been long enough in No. 19, however, to do a lot of mischief; mischief, indeed, which was destined to be the indirect cause of that which afterwards took place.

"This man's friends had money; and at different times had played every conceivable dodge to use it for his benefit—that is, for effecting his illicit freedom.

"It was a barefaced attempt to bribe the warder of our party, Jerry White (a typical Portlander), and when you say that, you say everything), that decided the authorities in London to change the sphere of McEwen's labour. No one was sorry, neither officers nor prisoners, as McEwen, being a dangerous man, we were visited daily by the principal warder of the district, rather more frequently than was altogether pleasant.

"In No. 19 there was also another 'lifer'; one, Dick Fletcher; a young fellow of twenty-seven, or thereabouts, for whom, when I got to know his history, I was more sorry than otherwise.

"His crime was fratricide, he having killed his brother during a quarrel over a girl with whom both were in love.

"It seems, from what I could make out, that the damsel favoured Dick, the younger brother, the fact having the unfortunate effect of rendering the other mad with jealousy and defeated hope. Anyway, the two met one day in the orchard of the old house in the quiet Kentish village, where dwelt Phyllis Prothero with her parents.

"Phyllis' name, as I understood it, came up; one word led to another, and Dick Fletcher, parrying with the gun in his hand, a murderous blow aimed at him by his brother, awoke to the terrible fact, as the weapon exploded, that he had shot his brother. At this moment Phyllis, alarmed by the report, came running through the orchard from the house to find Dick, the smoking double-barrel in his hand, standing over the dead body of his brother. She urged him to fly; but he refused absolutely, saying that it was the result of an accident, and that his conscience acquitted him of any evil intention.

"When arrested, he still continued to assert his innocence; and again when upon his trial at Maidstone Assizes. As so often happens, however, he was found guilty, and sentenced to penal servitude for life, the jury's recommendation to mercy on account of apparent absence of motive, having the effect of sparing him the capital penalty.

"He had served nearly five years at the time I speak of; and it was from his own lips that I heard the account of the matter, as I have briefly described it. It convinced me, and as I shall show, not without reason.

"Dick was a well-conducted, civil chap, and I could not for long make out why he had been told-off for the quarries; 'till I found out, quite by chance that the Governor, Captain Burnham, had, for some, then unexplained object, taken a violent dislike to the man; availing himself of every opportunity to show his spite.

"It appears that up to the time when McEwen, the bank forger aforesaid, first joined No. 19, Dick Fletcher—or C. 888—was a silent, reserved man, as far as his convict companions were concerned. They often tried to 'draw' him, but always failed.

"Directly McEwen appeared on the scene there was a change; a friendship springing up between the two men. They were both of them intelligent and well-informed; McEwen, indeed, speaking four or five languages fluently.

"Of course communication of any kind between prisoners was strictly against the rules, but when out of sight and hearing of the higher officials, the rule became within certain limits, a dead letter.

"I had noticed Fletcher and McEwen in close chat for several days previous to the latter's removal inside the gaol, and frequently during that time had to check and warn them.

"Warder White, as a rule, kept hard by the tool-box, near to which were the 'bankers' for the finer dressing of the special blocks of 'best-bed,' so that he could not always see what was going on in my corner of the

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quarry, where I had the oversight of ten men, including the two new chums.

"I tried several times to overhear what the pair were talking about, but McEwen, by a long way the sharper of the two, invariably provided against any eavesdropping, by keeping silence whenever I happened to approach too near.

"Upon McEwen's withdrawal, Fletcher relapsed again into his former state of taciturnity and reserve, speaking to no one, except to me, and then only in answer to my queries.

"Shortly after this the whole party was suddenly shifted to another district; that which included the moat or ditch surrounding the Verne Citadel. This wonderful excavation had yet much to be done to it, to render it complete; and so, one morning No. 19 was marched thither, taking over, on their arrival, the tools and impedimenta of the party previously working there.

"It was a welcome change for both officers and men; the monotonous 'tap-tap-tap' of the stone-dressing hammers; the choking white dust, and the eternal walls of grey, impenetrable stone, being exchanged for the more varied experience of hauling surplus material through the ditch and discharging it down a quarter-mile long inclined plane on the cliff-side opposite the breakwater.

"Here we had green slopes, and, on one part of the journey a genuine country road, while when we arrived each trip at the discharging point, we had a lovely view across the water to Weymouth, on the one hand, and, on the other, out to sea as far as the eye could reach.

"As nearly everybody knows, fogs of a peculiarly thick quality prevail periodically at Portland. This results in many days' confinement to inside, much to the men's delight, as it means idleness.

"Should a fog come on during labour, the parties are at once mustered and marched to 'shelters' provided for the purpose. If it becomes very thick, the great bell of the prison is tolled as a signal for return, and everybody is then taken in, under a strong escort of Civil Guards with fixed bayonets.

"During the time to which I more especially refer, fogs prevailed to an extent unusual even for Portland. For three, and sometimes four days in succession we were kept inside. Personally I objected to inside duty; the fetid air of the 'halls' or 'wards' together with the ceaseless strain upon one's mind, owing to the necessity for specially strict surveillance exhausting one far more than the ordinary labour duty in the open air.

"It was on one bright day succeeding a long spell of foggy weather, that a certain incident happened, which

Every limb seemed to tremble, his hands shaking so that he could scarce hold the rope.

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unimportant as it appeared to me at the time to be, acquired a peculiar significance in the light of after events.

"It was half-past seven when we passed down the bank, and out through the back postern gate of the prison.

"On we trudged, a long line of blue-smocked rascaldom, two-deep, relieved here and there by a dark blue-coated warder.

"Some distance in advance of the column, marched a strong posse of the Civil Guard, rifles under arm; while a dozen or more of the same brought up the extreme rear.

"On, across the network of railway lines, upon which trains of open trucks, and a number of snorting little locomotives were already busy, and rattling to and-fro in all directions.

"Half of our little army broke off at Quarry Gate to proceed to the 'West' district. More went straight on through the 'Waycroft,' while we, a solitary party of twenty-five men, with a principal, two warders, and four civil guards, descended by a masked incline to the 'Ditch.'

"I may just say that all strangers, except the military from the 'Verne,' were not, under any circumstances, allowed upon the Convict Works. There had, at one time, been so many cases of tampering with prisoners that the authorities were now very strict in keeping trespassers off the works.

"We found a load ready for us on our arrival at the Verne End, and after hooking on the ropes, we started for the discharge point. As I said, we had on our route to traverse the common or public road, for, it may be, a distance of a quarter of a mile or so. Here, of course, the rule with regard to visitors could not be enforced. All we might do was to keep a vigilant eye on the men, and see that they did not straggle.

"We had just turned into this road; and Warder White, my senior officer, had duly warned me (I headed the little procession), to be careful; when I saw standing behind a hedge that bordered a field, two ladies.

"Ladies they were, unmistakably; one of them being middle-aged and small, while the other was a tall, handsome girl, with eyes that even my passing glance could see were keen beyond the ordinary.

"As Dick Fletcher came abreast of the pair, I fancied somehow, that I could detect a flush break over the girl's face, while I was almost prepared to swear that she lifted her eyebrows in significant fashion; the slightest possible smile breaking about the corners of her eyes and mouth.

"As Dick Fletcher leaned over the rope, he could not see all this, until a slight cough made him look up.

"I have seen changes take place in men's faces on occasion, both before and since, but I have never seen such a remarkable change as passed over this man's features, when his eyes met those of the woman behind the hedge. Every limb, too, seemed to tremble, his hands shaking so, that he could scarce hold the rope.

"'Close up! Close up, there!' shouted Warder White. 'Mr. Sampson! ask those people to fall back till we've got by, please!'

"But there was no need for this, for hearing the warder's order, the two ladies voluntarily retired out of sight.

"There was not much in it; on the surface that is, but coupled with that which I already knew of Fletcher's history, why it might mean mischief.

"Evidently, these women were his friends; the girl, without doubt, when I come to think of it, his sweetheart! Poor chap! I was sorry for him, and it was only my duty that prevented me from telling him so.

"But the incident was not closed—yet.

"On our return with the empty trolly, and when passing the same spot, Fletcher stooped quickly and picked something up. This is against rules, as the article may be contraband. It was all done so suddenly and smartly that, only that more vigilance than usual was being exercised, the action would have passed unnoticed. Possibly had I alone seen it, it would not have so much mattered; but, unfortunately, it had not escaped the hawk-like eye of Warder White.

"'Halt! Fall in!'

"During the obeying of this order, and before any steps could be taken to prevent him, Fletcher rapidly ran his eye over the few words written on a small piece of white paper.

"The warder, seeing this, rushed towards him with the intention of snatching the document out of his hand, but it was too late! As the officer reached him, Fletcher deliberately and swiftly put the paper into his mouth, and—swallowed it!

"'Mr. Sampson! whistle for the Principal!'

"A minute or two after my shrill summons, the latter arrived; in no very good humour at being disturbed.

"'Hullo!' said he, as he came up. 'What's the matter?'

"'Fletcher, sir!' replied the warder. 'Picked up a "stiff" (a letter), and just as I was about to take it from him, he swallowed it!'

"'More fool you for letting him do it!' said Principal Heath, with whom Warder White was anything but a favourite. 'Well?'

"'Well, sir! What had I better do with him?'

"'Do with him? Why, handcuff him, and keep him with you till "knock-off." You ought to know your duty by this time, I should think, without worrying me to teach you.'

"The men grinned, and we all knew that the report, which would have to pass through the Principal's hands before reaching the Chief Warder, would not be very black.

"And so it proved, for the Deputy-Governor, before whom Fletcher appeared the next morning, merely sentenced him to a day's bread-and-water.

"But something else happened before that came off.

"The night of the same day that saw the appearance of the two women in the field of the Breakwater Road, I was on late duty inside, and did not leave the prison till past ten. My quarters were not far away, only a few hundred yards down the road leading into Portland village. The backs of the houses (a row of thirty) looked upon the prison stone yard, communicated with it, in fact, by means of doors in the rear walls of the respective gardens.

"I lit my pipe at the gate lodge, exchanged a 'Good-night!' with the gatekeeper and the Civil Guard sentry, and turning sharp to the right made fast for home.

"When about half way, I saw a tall figure, wrapped in a long, dark cloak, waiting in the shadow of one of the prison wall buttresses.

"Instinctively scenting something unusual, I loosened my cutlass in its sheath, prepared for developments.

Read "The Golden Dwarf."

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"'Good evening,' said a woman's voice, the sweetest and most musical that I had ever heard.

"'Good evening,' I replied, making as if to pass on.

"'I beg your pardon! Will you give me a moment, it is important—to me!'

"Now the road was, strictly speaking, a private one at this point, and practically confined to prison uses; so that any minute there was danger of someone connected with the gaol coming along. To see me talking to a stranger would therefore at once arouse suspicion, and the fact would certainly be reported to the Chief-Warder.

"'Excuse me, madam,' I said, politely but firmly 'but I have not the pleasure of knowing you, and it being late, I am anxious to get home as soon as possible.'

"'One moment!—just a moment!' she pleaded. 'You know a man named—Richard Fletcher?'

"'I cannot enter into or discuss any such matters,' I said, getting rather irritated at her persistency. 'You ought to know that it would be breach of trust on my part as an officer in the prison service.'

"'Yes—yes! Of course! But at the same time you are a man, and have a heart!'

"She assuredly was very winning and persuasive; but though I am susceptible to a degree, I am glad to remember now that I did not let the bewitchery of a woman's tongue make me to forget my duty.

"I tried to pass on, but she stood right in my path, preventing me.

"'Will you not help me?' she said yet more earnestly. 'You shall have anything you ask—two hundred!—three hundred!—*five* hundred pounds!'

"'Madam,' I said sternly, 'you surely forget yourself. Did I but do my duty, I should at once have you arrested for attempting to bribe one of Her Majesty's servants; but I am willing to believe that sorrow and grief have rendered you temporarily distraught, and that you know not what you do.'

"Then she burst into a flood of weeping; leaning against the boundary wall, and sobbing so, that she shook convulsively from head to foot.

"While genuinely sorry for her, I took the opportunity of saying that I must get on towards home, as I did so, moving away in that direction.

"In a moment the whole aspect and nature of the woman seemed to change.

"'Very well!' she said, not loudly, but so intensely that each syllable appeared to cut the air, so sharp and incisive were they. 'Very well! You will act according to your own ideas of right and wrong, you must not be surprised if I do the same. There will be no further need for communication between us, sir. Good night!'

"Gathering her cloak about her in a dignified way that compelled my admiration, she turned and sped down the road in front of me, at such a speed, that long before I reached my own door she was out of sight.

"The day following was so thick that the prison was closed, everybody remaining in.' This was Thursday. On Friday the morning broke misty, but as there appeared a promise of fine weather later on, the working parties were paraded for labour as usual, after early chapel, and march off to their respective districts.

"It kept fairly clear (I am speaking now with reference to No. 19 party only) until the head of the

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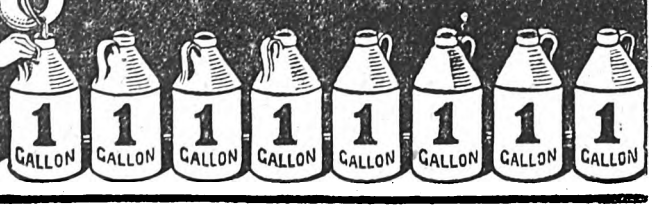

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masked incline was reached, and then the fog began to roll up in great wreaths of steam-like cloud from the sea.

"A halt was at once called, and there being a shelter conveniently close at hand, the men were hurried into it without delay.

"Duly mustered and counted, the men sat round the little lean-to, while I, with White, stood at the entrance of the place, which had been built up roughly of small stone blocks, and roofed with tarpaulin.

"Thicker and thicker grew the fog, till not only could we not see a foot away from the doorway, but the mist so penetrated the inside of the shed, that it was a job to do more than indistinctly make out each other.

"I was standing carelessly straggle-legged, and I had just glanced at my watch, and told White that it wanted but half-an-hour to knock-off, and that I supposed that the bell would not ring now, till eleven, as usual; when I was nearly jerked off my feet by a man, who shot himself, from behind, between my legs, on his hands and feet.

"For the moment I was paralyzed; while Warder White was simply struck dumb with bewildered amazement. When I recovered myself a bit, I shouted to White to remain with the men, among whom the greatest excitement prevailed; and first whistling vigorously for Civil Guard and Principal, I frantically rushed in the direction I supposed the runaway to have taken.

"Strange to say, although I did not actually know who it was that had made a dash for liberty, something told me that it was Dick Fletcher.

"It was like plunging into the unknown; but I pounded on, every now and then being brought up short by a fence, a boulder, or something in the shape of an obstacle.

"I was aware that the grassy slope upon which I ran trended down to the edge of the great ditch seventy feet or more in depth, the extreme fringe of it being protected by a light hurdle rail.

"Convinced that it would be dangerous to continue at such a pace through so thick a fog, I slackened a bit, and took to feeling my way more cautiously. I had no idea that I was so near to the brink of the ravine, when I suddenly came butt up against the protecting iron railing.

"Here I paused, and tried to pierce the misty blankness. I looked over the top of the railing, and saw that the ditch was brim full of fog, appearing, indeed, like to a sea of cloud.

"Then, I heard footsteps on the grass, quite near to me. I strained my ears to listen. Nearer they came, and nearer. Then I was conscious of a human being's panting breath close to me, and out of the mist there shaped itself the figure of a man, clad in convict garb.

"It was Dick Fletcher!

"At that moment, duty was paramount with me, and I made a grab at him; but with a dexterous twist he eluded me.

"'Fletcher!' I cried. 'You'd better give in!—you haven't the ghost of a chance!'

"He answered never a word, but making a run at me, lifted me clean up in his arms; (he stood well over six feet and was built in proportion); and threw me with all his force right up the bank from him.

"I fell with a thud on the wringing wet slippery grass, in time, however, to see him leap sheer over the railing, and disappear in the ocean of mist that filled the ditch.

"The floor of the moat being mainly rough stones, there was only one conclusion to come to with regard to him. He must have been dashed to pieces.

"Five minutes after, the fog began to lift; in another ten it being light and clear enough to make a search.

"Taking a civil-guard and four prisoners with me I rapidly descended to where the wretched man must have fallen.

"Backwards and forwards we went, minutely searching every nook and cranny, and every square inch of the ditch floor, but in vain. Nothing living or dead could we discover.

"Dick Fletcher had disappeared completely from human ken.

"There was nothing for it but for Principal Heath to report the circumstance; a man missing.

"The usual course in cases of escape was taken. The black ball was raised to the top of the big staff; a gun was fired from the Verne Fort, and soon the whole island, and even Weymouth were agog with the excitement of the event.

"But it was all useless. Dick Fletcher's guy was a mystery, and likely to remain so.

"One day, however, in the following month, it was partly solved. It had become necessary to do some blasting in the rocky sides of the ditch, and about that spot where Dick Fletcher had taken his flying leap, six feet down the cliff-side, we found a ledge, caving slightly into the solid rock, just large enough for a man to turn round upon.

"Hidden away in the extreme depths was a heap of prison clothing; the jacket and cap bearing the missing man's letter and number, 'C. 888.'

"It was easy to conjecture now how the thing was done. Fletcher, undoubtedly having become familiar with the place in the course of his work at some time; *dropped* on to the ledge, changed his clothes for some civilian toggery left there for him, and then, waiting a favourable opportunity, left his hiding-place for the shore (inland, of course, was barred), where a boat was ready to take him off.

"As a matter of fact, this was actually the case.

"Warder White got the sack; but I, in consideration (so the authorities said) of my trying my best to effect Fletcher's capture, got my 'W.'

"People in the neighbourhood talk of 'Dick Fletcher's guy' to this day, for I can assure you that successful escapes from Portland Isle, are as rare as—well—as the proverbial black swan.

* * * * *

"Only last summer, a few days, indeed, before I left the service, I received the following letter from Western Illinois, U.S.:

"'A man and his wife owe you a big debt for kindness rendered. They do not respect you one whit the less, in that you did, or tried to do your duty.'

"Then followed the description of how it was done.

"'We do not append our names—you know them only too well—and should we ever meet in this world; (there are more unlikely things in life); there is a hearty handshake, and a warm welcome for you.'

"Enclosed was a banker's draft for one thousand dollars—£250."

Ralph Enderby.

Read "The Golden Dwarf."

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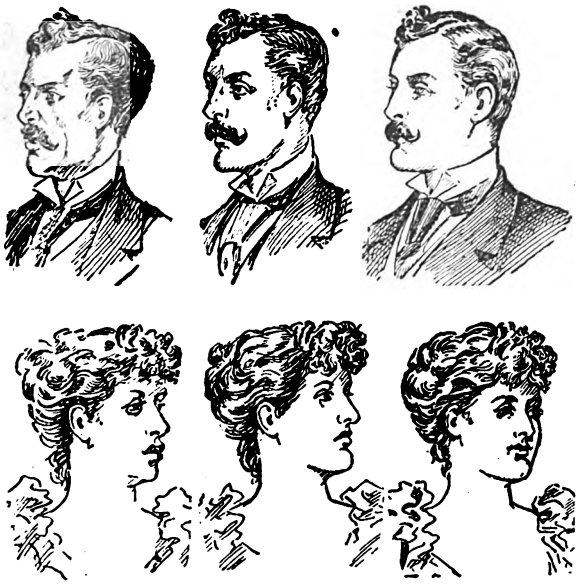

WONDERS OF FACE TRANSFORMATION.

Every year thousands of new books are published. They are read and forgotten. But once in a hundred years a new book appears which THE WORLD IS WAITING FOR. It contains some new truth which alters the history of mankind. Such a book has just issued from the press. You will read it. If not to-day, then some other day, for sooner or later it will be read by all men and all women. And when you have read it your life will be altered. It will become better, happier, more joyous. The writer of the book is Professor Boyd Laynard. The name of the book is "SECRETS OF BEAUTY, HEALTH, AND LONG LIFE." It is pronounced by the Press to be the most remarkable work of the century.

"The book is not a novel! Then who wants to read it? People only read novels and newspapers nowadays." That is what you say immediately. But for once you are wrong. At the present moment hundreds of thousands of people are turning over, and eagerly reading, the pages of this book which is not a novel. They are telling their friends about it, and very soon everyone will be reading the book that is not a novel. If you want to be interested, if you want to be instructed, if you want to live long, if you want to be healthy, if you want to be beautiful, you must read the book that is not a novel.

The first part of this remarkable book consists of a practical guide to the attainment of good looks without the aid of art. Professor Boyd Laynard will have nothing to do with powder, paint, face-washes, and the like, but gives plain instructions for the scientific cultivation of beauty. The rest of the book deals with health and long life. These chapters are of the highest value.

This remarkable handbook to the three subjects embraced in the title has been a long period in preparation by the author; being, in fact, the labour of many years of diligent research and earnest investigation. The work is arranged in 127 chapters, the whole of which (in the popular edition now offered to the public) is bound in one volume. The book, although published at Two Shillings, will, if ordered direct from the Publishers, be forwarded to readers of SHORT STORIES, carriage paid, at the low discount price of

ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE.

Amongst the numerous subjects dealt with in Professor Laynard's work the following are but a few. A Complete Syllabus, showing the contents of the whole of the 127 chapters, enumerating upwards of **500 subjects** and divisions of subjects, can be had free on application to the Publishers:

The way we make our own faces—Secrets of face transformation—Changeableness of beauty and its causes—Some Strange facts concerning the variableness of beauty—"Odd-faced" beauty—The countenance the counterpart of the mind—How pleasing expressions become permanent—How a person's habitual look is acquired—How permanent expressions can be transformed—Metaphysical secrets of keeping young and preserving a youthful appearance—The author's investigations into the causes why some individuals look younger than others at a certain age—Discovery of a great metaphysical secret—Wonders of the skin—Relation of the skin to beauty—Effects of mental emotions upon the skin—Effects of heat, cold, and changes of temperature upon the skin—Bad complexions and their causes—Diet that spoils and diet that improves the complexion—General care of the complexion—Construction, growth, and wonders of the hair—Why hair falls out, and its remedy—Premature greyness: its causes and prevention—General care of the hair—Superfluous hairs and how to treat them—Wrinkles: their prevention and treatment—Freckles, tan, and blackheads—Oily skin, dry skin, and loose skin—How the nose can be improved—Protruding ears and their treatment—Offensive breath—Anatomy of the teeth—Why teeth decay—General care of the teeth—Tallness, and how to attain it—Round shoulders and how to cure them—How to acquire a full chest—Perfect form and figure: their proper proportions—Thinness, and its treatment—Excessive stoutness—Care of the hands—Care of the feet—Physiognomy; or, the art of reading character from the face—Mental influences upon health—Power of the mind over the body—Influence of the mind in curing diseases—How the mind can cause dyspepsia—Effect of the direction of thought to the heart—How real diseases often supervene upon fancied ailments—How violent passions injure health—Laughter as a medicine—Ailments cured by laughter—Wonders of digestion—Relative value to our bodies of the principal articles of food—Fruits and vegetables as medicine: their various influences upon the physical system—Health preserving diet and its consistency—Diet favourable to mental exertion and intellectual culture—Influence of various foods upon our passions and propensities—The influence exerted by the mind upon the appetite and digestion—Some perilous articles of food—Light, and its influence upon health—Exercise and its relations to health—Baths and bathing: their influence upon health—The marriage state, and its influence upon health—Statistics showing the comparative vitality of married and single persons—100 professions, trades, and occupations: their respective influences upon health and long life—Sleep, and its relation to health—Insomnia, and its treatment—The eyes, and how to preserve them—The ears and hearing: how to prevent deafness—The voice: its cultivation and preservation—Memory, and how to improve it—Sudden failure of memory—Rules for cultivating the memory—Effect of some foods upon memory—Stammering, and how to cure it—Prevention of disease—Nervousness—Blushing: its physiology and treatment—Rules of life for attaining longevity—How to live to a hundred—Premature old age and its causes—Short biographies of 30 modern centenarians, whose ages range from 115 to 185 years—General principles that can be laid down for the anticipation of longevity—The eight signs of long life.

Professor Boyd Laynard has indeed acted wisely in issuing a popular edition of the work, at the low price of one shilling and sixpence, which brings it within the reach of all. It will be forwarded for the sum named, carriage paid, to any reader of SHORT STORIES. Kindly fill up the order form printed below, and send in at once with remittance.

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SHORT STORIES THAT MAKE YOU LAUGH.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, July 1st. Postcards only, please. The first prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. F. Sutherland, of 12 Crawford Street, Tyne Dock, South Shields, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

MOTHER: "I cannot allow you to play with those naughty children, Willie. They are rough and rude." Willie: "But you don't mind my fighting with them, mother, do you?"

"PRETTY cold weather, isn't it, Bobbie?" said Mrs. Slimson. "Yes, but you don't feel it half so much as you will next winter," said Bobbie Bingo. "What makes you think so?" "'Cause mamma says your sealskin cloak can't possibly last another year."

"DID you try that scheme of ringing a bell on Johnson when he was in the middle of his speech?" "Yes, and it fizzled. Johnson was a tram conductor at one time." "Well?" "I made the mistake of ringing twice, and he took it as a compliment; thought it was a signal for him to go ahead."

HEARING a faint russle in the dark hallway below, the elder sister, supposing the young man had gone, leaned over the balustrade and called out: "Well, Bessie, have you landed him?" There was a deep, sepulchral silence for some moments. It was broken by the hesitating, constrained voice of the young man: "She has!"

A DISTINGUISHED Indian officer, Scotch to the core, never lost an opportunity of advertising his countrymen. One evening at mess he had a large number of guests, and had a magnificent specimen of a Highland piper on duty behind his chair. To draw attention to the man's splendid appearance he turned to him and said: "What pairt o' Scotland do you come from, my man." With a punctilious salute the reply was: "Tipperary, yer honour."

IT was a case of burglary and the attorney was questioning a witness, thus: "You say that you had called to see Miss Jinks, and was present when the burglary was committed?" "Yes, sir, I was," replied the witness. "Then how was it that when the prisoner dashed into the room and kicked you behind, that you leaped through the window and ran off, making no attempt to protect the young lady or give alarm?" "Well, sir, I thought it was her father."

* SCENE: Boer farmer sitting at the door of his cottage; large stack of oat-straw in the background. Enter Colonel Shovealong's Staff officer. Staff Officer: "I have orders to either buy or destroy all forage and food in this district. I therefore give you notice that I am about to set fire to that pile of oat-straw." Boer Farmer: "Bod I dell you——" Staff Officer: "Resistance is futile." Boer Farmer: "Bod vould you please ——" Staff Officer: "I can listen to no excuses." The stack of oat-straw presently bursts into flames, and the Staff Officer goes on his way rejoicing. The Boer turns to his wife, and says: "Does khakis are strange peoples. I vanted to dell him dat dis vas de oat-straw dat I haff sold to de colonel half-an-hour ago," and he thoughtfully jingled the British sovereigns in his pocket.

MR. NEWPOP: "You haven't seen our baby yet. He's only three months old, but I tell you he's bright." Jack Bachelor: "That so. Can he—er—sit up on his hind legs and beg?"

"Too bad! There has been an accident to the machinery in the mill, and they can't send us any more of those goods at present," said the junior partner. "It is too bad," replied the senior partner. "That clearance sale will have to be postponed."

"DID you take much pressing before you accepted Jack?" asked one young lady of her friend, who had just got engaged. "Oh, a lot. And then Jack is so strong, you know. He nearly squeezed all the breath out of my body."

A LITTLE North of England girl was taken to hear the great oratorio "The Messiah" the other day. The chorus "All we like sheep," where the phrase is repeated over and over again for several pages, struck her rather comically. Just at a pianissimo movement, when the rest of the audience were attending with strained ears, she was overheard to remark to a companion that she supposed it meant, "We all like mutton."

"DOES your little boy ever go in swimming without your permission?" asked Mrs. Greene of Mrs. Brown. "No, indeed. I thought he had been in when he came home yesterday with his hair wringing wet; but it seems he hadn't. He fell from a wharf." "And got his clothes wet through?" "Oh, no," exclaimed Mrs. Brown, "he fell with such force that he was driven right through his clothing." "But how do you know that?" queried Mrs. Greene. "Why, Johnny told me so himself." "Oh!"

IN a village near K—— there lives a well-known fowl breeder, who rears and keeps his fowls in a cote close to the railway. One morning he gave the hens a lot of Indian corn to eat, and was surprised to see the sparrows swallowing the corn and eating as much as the hens. He made up his mind to bring the biggest corn he could produce. The next morning he watched closely to see if the sparrows came. They came, but could not swallow the corn, and he thought he had got them. But the sparrows kept flying away and coming again, taking a grain a time till it was all gone. Then he made up his mind to watch where they went to, and to his astonishment and dismay, saw them place the grain of corn on the railway metals, fly on to the telegraph wires, and wait till the train had gone over them, when they flew down and ate the corn, thus outdoing the old fowl breeder with all his tricks.

In consequence of the great pressure on our space, we are compelled to hold over the Editor's Page this week. For this loss, readers will find ample compensation by turning to the first page of this number, where the "GOLDEN DWARF" begins.

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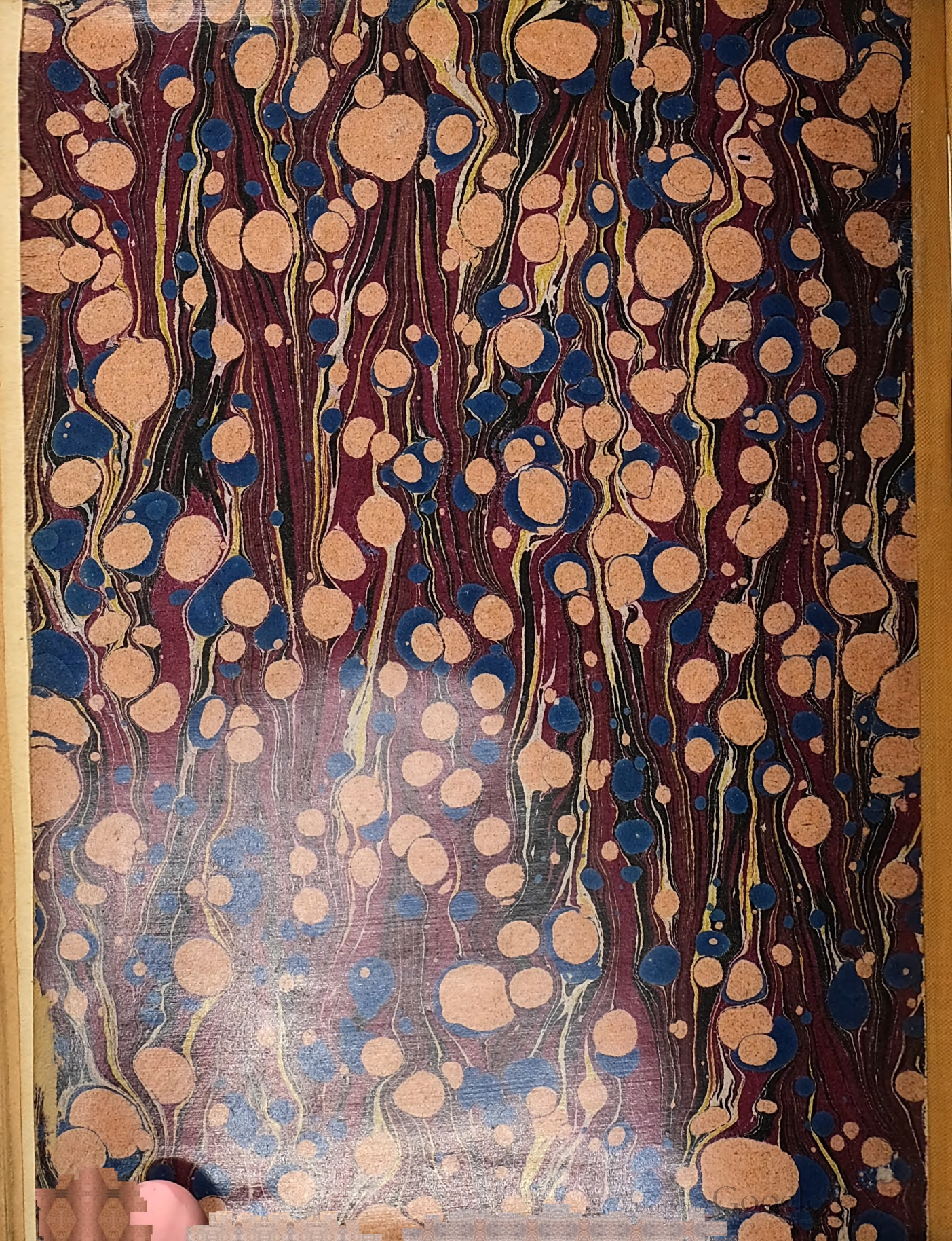
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